

Environmental spy



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BEYOND FANTASY FICTION

SINE OF THE MAGUS

By James E. Gunn

MAY
1954
35c

EDITED BY
H. L. GOLD



ARC

BEYOND

FANTASY FICTION

MAY 1954

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brings you
“good luck”**



"Six months after making the coupon, I had a promotion and a big raise in pay!"



the moment I reached the square, my luck changed."

¹¹ Why break down
what I said this way?

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1.2.4. Summary of the Paper

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS



圖 4-2-1 鋼、鋁、銅及不銹鋼的熱處理

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Year	Age	Year	Age	Year	Age
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1999	19	2000	20	2001	21
2002	22	2003	23	2004	24
2005	25	2006	26	2007	27
2008	28	2009	29	2010	30
2011	31	2012	32	2013	33
2014	34	2015	35	2016	36
2017	37	2018	38	2019	39
2020	40	2021	41	2022	42
2023	43	2024	44	2025	45
2026	46	2027	47	2028	48
2029	49	2030	50	2031	51
2032	52	2033	53	2034	54
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2086	106	2087	107	2088	108
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2092	112	2093	113	2094	114
2095	115	2096	116	2097	117
2098	118	2099	119	2100	120

	Year	Age	Gender	Occupation	Education	Income	Health	Mental Health	Social Support	Life Satisfaction	Resilience	Coping Strategies	Stress Management	Emotional Regulation	Self-Efficacy	Growth Mindset	Optimism	Gratitude	Purpose in Life	Meaning in Life	Existential Well-being	Transcendental Well-being	Overall Well-being
1	2018	25	F	Teacher	Bachelor's	\$45,000	Good	Mild Anxiety	Family	7.5	High	Active Coping	Exercise	Deep Breathing	Strong	Open	Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.0
2	2019	26	M	Engineer	Master's	\$60,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	8.5	Very High	Problem Solving	Meditation	Progressive Relaxation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Regular Practice	Well-defined Purpose	Very High Meaning	Extremely High	Extremely High	9.5
3	2020	27	F	Nurse	Associate Degree	\$50,000	Good	Moderate Stress	Family	7.0	Medium-High	Seeking Help	Yoga	Transcendental Meditation	Moderate	Neutral	Moderately Positive	Occasional Practice	Vague Purpose	Low-Medium Meaning	High	High	8.0
4	2021	28	M	Software Developer	Bachelor's	\$70,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Active Coping	Running	Mindfulness	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
5	2022	29	F	Marketing Specialist	Master's	\$55,000	Good	Mild Depression	Family	7.0	Medium-High	Seeking Help	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Moderate	Neutral	Moderately Positive	Occasional Practice	Vague Purpose	Low-Medium Meaning	High	High	8.0
6	2023	30	M	Project Manager	Bachelor's	\$65,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	8.5	Very High	Problem Solving	Hiking	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
7	2024	31	F	Data Analyst	Master's	\$75,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Active Coping	Jogging	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
8	2025	32	M	Business Development	Bachelor's	\$80,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Problem Solving	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
9	2026	33	F	Human Resources	Master's	\$85,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Active Coping	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
10	2027	34	M	Operations Manager	Bachelor's	\$90,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Problem Solving	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
11	2028	35	F	Product Manager	Master's	\$95,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Active Coping	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
12	2029	36	M	Finance Analyst	Bachelor's	\$100,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Problem Solving	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
13	2030	37	F	UX Designer	Master's	\$105,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Active Coping	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
14	2031	38	M	Systems Administrator	Bachelor's	\$110,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Problem Solving	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
15	2032	39	F	Quality Assurance	Master's	\$115,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Active Coping	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
16	2033	40	M	IT Support	Bachelor's	\$120,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Problem Solving	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
17	2034	41	F	Customer Service	Master's	\$125,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Active Coping	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
18	2035	42	M	Sales Representative	Bachelor's	\$130,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Problem Solving	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
19	2036	43	F	Administrative Assistant	Master's	\$135,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Active Coping	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
20	2037	44	M	Account Executive	Bachelor's	\$140,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Problem Solving	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
21	2038	45	F	Business Development	Master's	\$145,000	Excellent	No Issues	Friends & Family	9.0	Very High	Active Coping	Swimming	Transcendental Meditation	Very Strong	Very Open	Very Positive	Daily Practice	Clear Purpose	High Meaning	Very High	Very High	9.5
22	2039	46																					

Keywords: Canadian students; post-secondary education; international correspondence schools; Canada; U.S.; Mexico; Ontario

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May, 1954 Vol. 1, No. 6

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Sine

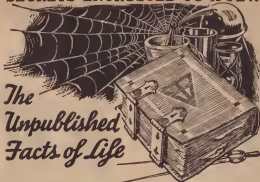
THE white letters on the corrugated blackboard spelled out — CONVENTION — October 30 and 31—Crystal Room.

I chuckled. Hotel bulletin boards are like movie marquees. Often as not, there is something misspelled on them.

My smile faded and I glanced around uneasily, but my man

Illustrated by VIDMER

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THERE ARE some things that can not be generally told—things you ought to know. Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for personal power and accomplishment in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of the hidden processes of man's mind, and the mystery of life's problems. Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

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Please send copy of sealed booklet, "The Mastery of Life," which I shall read as directed.

Name _____

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City _____

of the magus

*Being an unusual private eye, Casey
could spell . . . but he couldn't spell
a way out of enchantment and murder!*



hadn't come in. There was no reason to be uneasy, except that I didn't like the job. Not that it promised to be tough. It was too simple, really, and the old lady was paying too much, and I felt as if there were eyes watching me—which was a good switch and enough to give any private detective a neurosis and . . .

Hell! Why should anyone pay me a thousand bucks just to find out a guy's name?

I walked across the wide polished-marble floor to the desk. I rigged myself against it so that I could watch the door, and the clerk looked up. You know the type. Thin, thirtyish, his embittered bald head gleaming even brighter than the floor, obsequious to his superiors, vindictive toward those placed under him. It was my misfortune that he knew me.

"Hello, Charlie," I said.

"Casey," he said suspiciously. "What are you doing here?"

"Business."

"No trouble, Casey," he said warily, "or I'll have you tossed out of here. The management won't have you raiding rooms and snapping pictures. Our guests pay—"

"No trouble," I said. "It's not that kind of assignment."

HE subsided, but his eyes were restless on my face. "Since when have you handled anything but divorce cases?"

"I've come up in the world, Charlie. Who puts the notices on the board over there?"

"I do," he said. "Why?"

"Can't spell, either, eh?" I said.

He glanced at the board and then back at me, his face serious. "There's nothing misspelled there," he said.

"You know," I told him, "I've always wanted to attend a convention." It started as a joke but, when I got to the key word, my voice broke, and a shiver ran up my back.

"Now's your chance," Charlie said, "because that's what it is. He insisted on it being spelled that way."

"A nice story," I said, "but it would never stand up in court."

"There he is now, coming through the door," Charlie told me.

I turned my head and froze. He was a tall man, with dark hair and graying temples, slim and distinguished in evening clothes. And in his lapel, as he passed, was a five-pointed star, small, golden and engraved. The description checked. This was my man.

I started after him.

"Casey . . ." Charlie began. He was warning me.

I waved a reassuring hand back at him and followed the dark back that moved straight and purposefully toward the elevator bank.

One car was almost full. My

quarry stepped into it and turned around. The doors started to close in front of my face. He looked directly at me for a long moment before the doors slid together.

His eyes were deep and black and speculative. And I got a foolish impression that they continued to stare at me through the closed brass doors, seeing, weighing, and discarding contemptuously, before they turned their speculative depth on something more worthy.

The after-image vanished. I looked up quickly. The arrow was slowing. It came to a stop on C, there hesitated before it began swinging again.

"Going up?" someone asked, almost in my ear.

I jumped and caught myself, then stepped through the open doors of the car on my right. The doors closed. "C," I said.

We silently slid upward. Bricks alternated with painted metal in the frames of the small windows. *M, A, B*, went by. The first stop was mine. The doors parted in front of me, and I was in a carpeted hall facing a cream-colored corridor wall. Painted in gold, was an arrow pointing to my right. Above it, were two words—*Crystal Room*.

THE Crystal Room had double doors, but only one of them was open. There was a dark back just going through it. A young

man stood beside the door, nodding respectfully to the man who entered. A doorkeeper—the party was private.

Keeper of the crystal door. Inside was something called a convention that sent unreasonable shivers up my back. And inside, too, was a nameless man — I couldn't mistake that erect back—whose name was worth a thousand dollars to me, and who had eyes like polished black obsidian daggers.

I pushed the flat automatic in my shoulder holster into a more comfortable position and started after my thousand bucks. I nodded familiarly to the doorkeeper, who had broad shoulders, a crew-cut and a pleasant sunburned face, and started through the doorway.

I felt as if I had walked into a glass wall. I stopped and rubbed my nose ruefully.

"Where's your name card?" the doorkeeper asked.

"Name card?" I said aimlessly. I snapped my fingers. "I knew I forgot something. But you know me. Casey from Kansas City? Met you last year. Don't you remember my face?"

He frowned. "How would I remember your face?"

That stopped me. Why wouldn't he remember my face—outside of the fact that he had never seen it before? He didn't recognize me, but, apparently, that was all right.

He didn't expect to!

"Maybe I've stuck the card in one of my pockets," I said.

I began rummaging hopefully through my gray flannel suit. There was only one way to go from here—back, the way I came—but I could make it graceful. Then, I felt something slick and rectangular in my right-hand coat pocket. Slowly, I pulled it out. It was a name card.

The young man looked at it and nodded. "Gabriel," he said. "Wear it from now on. I can't let anybody in without a card."

I nodded mechanically and walked cautiously into the large room. The invisible wall was gone. Just inside the door, I stopped and turned the card over.

In the center was a circular seal. Imprinted over it in black, were two lines of type. *Call me GABRIEL, I read, or pay me five dollars.*

That was funny enough, but it wasn't the funniest part. The card had no business in my pocket. No one could have put it there. The suit had just come back from the cleaners. I put it on just before I left home this morning.

"Gabriel," I muttered to myself. Gabriel was one of the archangels, the one who carried messages and blew trumpets. That was a hell of a name for a man.

Convention — brass doors with eyes in them — invisible walls —

archangels! I shivered.

The Crystal Room was pleasant enough. It wasn't the largest ballroom in the hotel, but it was one of the most attractive. A huge crystal chandelier hung from the center of the ceiling. Two smaller ones flanked it on either side. The ceiling and walls were painted a deep rose. The carpet on the floor was dark burgundy.

A MAKESHIFT stage had been put up at the other end of the room. It was draped in black with black hangings behind it. Several chairs were lined up neatly at the back of the stage. In front of them, was a lectern. Between me and the platform, were rows of wooden chairs—I counted thirteen rows of thirteen chairs each. A few of the chairs were occupied, but most of the people in the room were standing, clustered in small groups, chatting. I looked them over carefully, but my man wasn't among them.

The scene was typical of hundreds of professional meetings that take place in hundreds of rooms daily, all over the country. Once a year, they assemble to discuss their single shared interest, to talk shop, to listen to the latest advances, to raise standards. And, to indulge in some heavy drinking, character assassination and idle—or not so idle—flirtations.

The men here were well dress-

ed—although none of them were in evening clothes—and distinguished. The women—there were fewer of them—were all young and beautiful. I'd never seen so many beautiful women in one room before, not even the time I tailed one wandering spouse backstage at a Broadway musical.

But what was their profession? It was a meeting of—what?

If I moved a few steps to the right, I could get a better look at a Junoesque redhead. I moved a few steps to the right. My foot caught. I stumbled. As I pitched forward, my arms reached out for support. They closed around something. It was softly rounded and yielding. It gasped. I looked up into a pair of blue eyes that were crinkled with sudden laughter. I was pressed tightly against one of the most delightful figures it has been my luck to be pressed tightly against.

"You see?" a soft low voice said. "Redheads are unlucky."

"For who?" I muttered.

"I don't think you'll fall down now," she said, laughing, "if you let go."

I straightened up and let my arms drop at my sides. "I must have stumbled over something." I looked down at the plush carpet suspiciously. But there was nothing to stumble over.

"It's better to stumble than to fall," she said. "Especially for La

Voisin. She's a hag, really. Fifty, if she's a day."

I took another look at the redhead. "I don't believe it."

She shrugged lightly, and I looked at *her* for the first time. She was only pretty—the rest of the women in the room were beautiful. Her blue eyes and dark hair made an interesting contrast, but her features had small imperfections. Her eyes were too large, her nose was too small and turned up a little at the end. Her mouth was too generous, her chin too stubborn. Now that I was straightened up, she reached only to my chin. But her skin was smooth cream and her figure was—well, I mentioned that already.

SHE seemed to be in her early twenties, which gave her almost a decade on me. The other women didn't look much older, it was true, but there was a maturity to them, and a youthfulness in her that revealed itself in an impish grin. She knew she was being inspected, and she didn't care.

She laughed again. It was a pleasing, girlish sound. "Have a program, Gabriel," she said.

She handed me a booklet from a stack beside her. I took it, wondering if her eyesight was unusually good. It would have to be, to read my name plate. I still had it in my hand.

I leaned forward to read the

name on the card attached to the exciting slope of her white knitted dress.

Call me ARIEL, it read, or pay me five dollars.

"Ariel?" I said. "Ariel? Where's Prospero?"

"He's dead," she said simply.

"Oh!" I said. That was the trouble with being an uninitiate. You couldn't say anything, for fear of saying the wrong thing. "Thanks for the program, Ariel. And the support."

"Any time," she said.

I started to turn away. A large, jovial man with white hair barred my path.

"Ariel," he said over my head. "It was sad news about your father. The society won't seem the same."

She murmured something while I glanced at the card on the broad chest in front of me. It demanded that its wearer be called Samael.

"It's a disgrace that he's got you here, passing out programs like a neophyte," Samael said. "You should be up on the platform with the others."

"Nonsense," she said. "I volunteered. And in spite of what my father was, I'm just an apprentice."

"Tut-tut," he said. I listened with fascination. I didn't think anyone said tut-tut any more. "You're an adept, if there ever was one. I'd match you against any of them."

"Excuse me," I said, trying to squeeze past.

"Samael," Ariel said. "This is Gabriel."

The large red face swiveled around to inspect me. "Gabriel, eh? I've heard fine things about you. Great things are expected—great things indeed."

He'd heard about me? "You haven't heard anything until you hear me blow my trumpet," I told him.

"Exactly," he said. "Exactly." He turned back to Ariel. "How did your father die, my dear?"

"Oh," she said slowly, "he just seemed to wither away."

"*Wither!*" The word held connotations for the red face that bleached it white. "Oh, dear! Withered, eh?" He was backing away, shaking his head in distress. "Very sad—very sad indeed. Ah, well, we all must go. Good-by, my dear."

I watched Ariel. She was staring sadly after the rapidly disappearing white haired Samael. "That's what always happens," she said.

JUST then, I saw my man come out of a small door in back of the platform and climb to the top of the stage. "Who's that?" I asked quickly, incautiously, touching her arm.

"I wish I knew," she said slowly.

"He's a stranger?" I said.

"Of course not. He's the Magus."

"The Magus?"

"That's what we call our chairman."

"But what's his name?" I wanted to know.

"He calls himself Solomon."

"Or pays five dollars. I know." I sighed. "See you around, Ariel."

The seats had begun to fill up, but the back row was still empty. I wandered over and sat down. Overhead, the crystal chandeliers tinkled their eternal music. This, in spite of the fact that I couldn't feel a breeze.

I wasn't playing it smart. I was blundering along, giving myself away at every opportunity. The girl now—she knew I didn't belong here. But she didn't seem to care. How many others knew?

It had all seemed so simple at first. Here's a thousand bucks. Find out a man's name.

A name, a name—what's in a name? Gabriel, Ariel, Prospero, Samael, La Voisin—how the hell did she sneak in?—and now Solomon, the Magus. I should have told the old lady that. I should have said, "What's in a name?"

II

I'D sat alone in my office for a long time after she left, thinking it over. I'd sat there flipping a quarter before she showed up, be-

cause it was my last quarter. I kept telling myself that, if it turned up heads, I would walk out of the office for the last time and go down and spend the quarter for a hot dog and a cup of coffee and then start looking for some lucrative work.

But, no matter how many times I flipped it, it always came up tails. Finally, I let it lay on the blotter.

When I'd looked up, the little, old gray-haired lady was sitting there, looking lost in the big chair. It was the one respectable piece of furniture in the office, except for the desk—and that was somewhat marred by my heels. The chair, of course, was due to be repossessed any day now.

I must have looked startled. I hadn't heard her come in.

"I knocked, but you didn't seem to hear me," she said. Her faded blue eyes twinkled. "Shall we talk business?"

"Business?" I said.

"I want you to find a man."

"Who?"

"If I knew that, I wouldn't need a detective, would I?" she asked briskly. "He'll be coming into the lobby of the hotel around the corner between nine-thirty and ten o'clock tomorrow morning. You won't have any trouble recognizing him. I'm sure he'll be tall and slim, with dark hair, graying around the temples, very distinguished-look-

ing. He'll be wearing formal clothes."

"At ten o'clock in the morning?"

"Oh, yes. And he'll have a pentacle in his lapel."

"A what?"

"A five-pointed star, made of gold and engraved with symbols."

I nodded as if I understood. It was a good piece of acting. "What do you mean, you're sure he'll look like this and that? Haven't you seen him before?"

"Oh, yes. I saw him yesterday. I'm sure he won't trouble to change."

"Change what?" I asked with heavy sarcasm. "His clothes or his face?"

"Either. But I can see I'm confusing you. Oh, dear!"

CONFUSING me—that was the understatement of the year. My head was spinning like the gears of a slot machine. I should have called the whole thing off right then, but I looked down at the top of the desk and hit the jackpot. Beside the quarter was a rectangular piece of paper printed green. In each corner was a figure 1, followed by three lovely symbols for nothing. One by one the gears clicked to a stop. This, I could understand. I picked up the bill and turned it over. I crinkled it gently. It seemed genuine.

I looked at the little old lady

sitting in the chair, her spectacles perched on the end of her nose, and I didn't remember seeing or hearing her get up to approach the table.

"Will that be enough?" she asked anxiously.

"To start with," I said, and I was lost. "Let me get this straight. He'll be coming into the hotel lobby about ten in the morning. I spot him. I tail him—"

"And make very certain he doesn't know you're doing it—very certain! It could be dangerous."

"Dangerous, eh?" I stared at the bill in my hand. Maybe it wasn't so big after all. Not that I'm afraid of danger—not in moderate amounts. I just wasn't sure I wanted a thousand bucks' worth. "I tail him, and then what?"

"You find out his real name."

"I see." I nodded. "He's going under an alias."

She hesitated. "I guess that's what you'd call it. But you must remember that he's very skillful at—disguises. If you see him get in a car, and see someone get out later, looking much, much different, you musn't be surprised. His name will be what I want."

"I get it," I said. I really did. The old lady had a monomania. She had been looking under her bed for so long that she had started seeing things. Specifically, a man of many faces. And now, she wanted to know his name. You

wouldn't have suspected it, just looking at her, but monomaniacs are usually completely normal, except on the one subject of their madness. Nobody would show up in the lobby. I would charge her for a day's work and expenses and give the rest of the money back. Hell, if I turned her down, she might go to someone who wasn't ethical, who would give her a fake name and keep the whole thousand. It was the only thing to do. I was also hungry. "Where will I get in touch with you, Miss . . . ?"

"Mrs.," she said. "Mrs. Peabody. You won't." She hopped up spryly. "I'll get in touch with you." I got a final faded-blue flash of twinkling eyes as she swept out the door and was gone.

I leaped to my feet and reached the door in three strides. I tore it open and looked down the corridor both ways. The corridor was empty. I had wanted to ask her something. I'd planned to ask the name the man was going under, his alias. Mrs. Peabody had really hired herself a detective.

I went back to the desk and studied the bill for a long time. I almost didn't make it to the bank . . .

SOLOMON—that was his name. So what? There were lots of people named Solomon. I knew one myself. Sol the Tailor. But he had a last name. You don't go up

to a person and say, "I'm Solomon." Not unless you want the other person to reply wittily, "And I'm the Queen of Sheba." It wasn't such a hot alias.

I looked down at the program. It had a shiny black cover. Across the top it said:

THIRTEENTH ANNUAL
CONVENTION OF THE MAGI
October 30 and 31

In the middle was a seal, an odd-looking design of two concentric circles, enclosing what looked like the plan of an Egyptian burial pyramid. Not the pyramid itself, but the corridors and hidden chambers and transepts, or whatever they're called. In the corridors and between the two circles were letters printed in a foreign alphabet I didn't recognize.

The seal looked familiar. I looked at my name card. The same seal.

I leafed through the program. There were the usual advertisements. I read them with interest. They would give me a clue to the society.

One of them was illustrated with engraved five-pointed stars. **PENTACLES OF GUARANTEED EFFICACY**, it said. *Consecrated. Guaranteed. P. O. Box—*

Pentacles? I didn't know what they were, but if I ever needed one, I'd know where to get it. *Guaran-*

teed, too, for whatever it did.

Another ad touted a book entitled, ONE HUNDRED SPELLS FOR ALL OCCASIONS. *Revised, with mathematical and verbal equivalents printed side by side. Satisfaction or your money back.*

Spells? I frowned.

There was a long list of books which could be obtained from the Thaumaturgical Book Shop, for prices ranging from one hundred dollars. All were listed as manuscript copies.

At the bottom, all by itself, was CLAVICULA SOLOMONIS. *The true Key of Solomon—In his own hand.* This was priced at \$10,000. At that, it was dirt cheap. A manuscript written by Solomon himself!

I skipped over the page of the day's program and continued my inspection of the ads. You never realize the fantastic things you can buy until you chance upon a specialized bulletin like this.

Magic wands—cut from virgin hazel with one blow of a new sword; quill pens—from the third feather of the right wing of a male goose; arthames—tempered in mole blood; black hens and hares, nails—from the coffin of an executed criminal: graveyard dust—guaranteed . . .

IT was fascinating. Also, it pinpointed the nature of the society. It was a professional

organization for stage magicians. The names they used were their stage names. The things advertised were their tools, their props. Still, it was all so serious. *Guaranteed—satisfaction, or your money back.* The words and phrases were everywhere. Nothing was labeled as an illusion.

I shrugged. It was some kind of esoteric joke. I turned back to the list of the day's activities and puzzled over it for a moment. It was headed October 30, and it was the only page. Where was the one for October 31? I shrugged again. I decided I had been given a defective program.

I glanced down the page—

OCTOBER 30

- 10:30 SPELL and GREETINGS
by the Magus
- 10:45 WITCHCRAFT—A DERIVATION
- 10:50 SAFETY IN NUMBERS
—THE COVEN
- 11:00 THE ELEMENTS OF THE
ART (with examples)
- 11:30 CONTAGION — WHY
SPELLS ARE CATCHING
- 12:00 IMITATION — THE SINCEREST
FORM OF SORCERY
- 12:30 CALCULUS, THE HIGH
ROAD TO BETTER FORMULAE
- 1:00 Recess
- 3:00 PRACTICAL USES FOR
FAMILIARS
- 4:00 ALEXANDER HAMILTON'S
CORBIE
- 5:00 LYCANTHROPY — A
DEMONSTRATION

That stopped me. I knew what lycanthropy was. It meant people turning into werewolves. And these people were going to demonstrate it. They were crazy, all of them, and the sooner I got out of here, the happier I would be.

"You don't belong here," someone said softly.

I looked around quickly. Ariel was sitting beside me, her head close to mine. In other circumstances, I would have enjoyed it. Now I drew back a little. "You're telling me," I said. "I mean, why do you think that?"

"It's obvious. You didn't know Solomon. You act like a stranger. And I happen to know that Gabriel is dead."

"Did *he* wither away?" My voice was uneven.

"No, he was hit by a car while crossing a street. I don't think anybody else knows."

I was wearing a dead man's card. "That does it," I said, getting up. "I'm leaving." This was obviously no place for me.

She had hold of my coat. She was yanking it vigorously, "Sit down," she whispered, looking around anxiously. I sat down. "You can't leave now," she said. "They'd get suspicious. And they don't take any chances. I won't give you away. Wait until recess, when everybody leaves."

I pointed a shaky finger at the program. "But this—*this* . . ."

SHE looked at me, and her eyes were wide and blue and innocent. "It's only magic."

"*Magic!*" I exclaimed softly. "Real magic?"

"Of course," she said. "What did you think it was?"

I had ideas on the subject, and they didn't coincide with hers. Magic? Madness was more like it. The only question was, who was crazy? She didn't look crazy. The rest of them didn't look crazy. They looked like handsome, intelligent people gathered together to discuss their profession. Magic? Oh, no! Not today. Not here and now in a big metropolitan hotel, with the sun shining down, and cars in the street outside, and airplanes flying overhead, and people going about their everyday business.

Spells and magic wands and graveyard dust. Witchcraft and formulae and sorcery. "*Ouch!*" I said.

"What's the matter?" Ariel asked anxiously.

I rubbed my thigh. I was awake all right. It was bad news. If I wasn't asleep, and *they* weren't crazy, *I* was the one who was off his rocker.

The man called Solomon was on his feet, standing behind the lectern. Everybody else was seated and the place was almost filled. Against the black drapes, Solomon's face floated whitely above

a triangular expanse of shirt front, and his disembodied white hands hovered in the air for silence. They got it.

He began to speak. His voice was low, resonant and clear, and I couldn't understand a word he said. His fluttering hands gestured a strange accompaniment. He finished, smiled and launched into a general welcoming speech to the society. It could have been repeated, word for word, to any professional meeting in the country.

Ariel leaned toward me. "The first part was an Egyptian spell," she whispered. "Asking that we be blessed every day."

"Damned decent of him," I growled, but it was to hide the fact that I did feel happier. Well, not happier exactly. There was a word for it, but I didn't want to use it. Blessed.

THE first five speakers on the program were as dry as only the learned can be when they are discussing their specialties. Even the audience of initiates grew restless, as they expounded their technicalities and quibbled over minutiae.

And I sat and listened in a state of shock. They were being dull about magic. They were being pedantic about sorcery. And a pragmatic belief in its existence as a practical, usable force lay behind everything they said.

One of them demonstrated, etymologically, that witchcraft is the art or craft of the wise. Another pointed out the significance of the Medieval satanist groups of thirteen, which were called covens, and why their annual meeting had been named as it was this year, and the thirteen rows of chairs in the room, each with thirteen chairs in it, and the number of people in attendance — exactly one hundred sixty-nine.

The audience murmured. Ariel stirred beside me. "I don't like it," she said nervously. "I was afraid of this."

If I had not been dazed by a continual bombardment of the impossible, I might have come out of the meeting with a liberal education in the theory and practice of magic. The next three speakers went into it thoroughly.

Terms swirled around me. Demonstrations went on in front of my eyes. Spells, rites, the condition of the performer—faith and works—Sir James Frazier—the reservoir of psychic power. Twisting columns of smoke assumed subhuman, leering faces. A beautiful girl in a bathing suit materialized out of the air and posed prettily for the audience. A tall cool drink appeared in a speaker's hand and was drained thirstily.

Contagion — the association of ideas by contiguity in space or time—the part is equal to the

whole—hair — nail clippings — the law of contact.

Imitation — the association of ideas by similarity—an effect can be produced by imitating it—wax images—homeopathy—the law of similarity.

Demonstrations. I held onto my seat.

The final speaker climbed slowly to the stage from the floor. For some reason, he had not been given a seat with the rest of the speakers. He was a little man, rosy-cheeked, with a fringe of white hair encircling a bald spot that gleamed pinkly from the stage as he bent over a thick bound manuscript.

He looked out over the audience hopefully and read a few introductory paragraphs in a high sprightly voice. His thesis was that developments in higher mathematics had made psychic phenomena truly controllable for the first time in history. He implied that the society had been founded on this theory, that its purpose had been to develop the theory into a workable science. He suggested that these things had been allowed to slip overboard—if they had not been purposefully jettisoned for something darker and less significant.

The audience murmured. There was a note of uneasiness in it. The speaker peered over the lectern benignly.

"Who's that?" I whispered to Ariel.

She was sitting up very straight, her eyes roaming over the audience. "Uriel," she said, and sighed.

In spite of this, Uriel said, he had been going ahead with the research as originally planned, and he now proposed to give the society a summary of the results.

HE asked for a blackboard and, like every other lecturer I've ever seen, had trouble getting it on the stage. Two young men struggled with it, stumbling, juggling, catching their feet on unsuspected projections. When it was finally in place, it effectively barred Solomon and the previous speakers from the view of the audience, but the board seemed to have a life of its own. It kept jiggling and jumping while Uriel was trying to write on it.

The audience tittered.

Uriel stepped back and turned his head to scan the upturned faces below him. He sighed, as if he was accustomed to this sort of thing. "We have practical jokers," he observed. "That is quickly remedied. You are all familiar with the usual verbal formula, which sometimes works and more often does not."

He drew two crude arrows on the blackboard. They pointed down at the floor. Above them, he scribbled a formula that looked

vaguely familiar to me, filled with elongated *f*'s and little triangles which, were, I supposed, the Greek letter *delta*. The moment Uriel wrote down the last symbol, the board stopped jiggling.

"Now," he said, like a patient professor with a backward class, "let us proceed."

And then he launched, unfortunately, into a history of calculus, beginning with Newton and Leibnitz, which bored everyone in the audience except a few who may have been professional mathematicians—and me, oddly enough. A little of my college mathematics came back, and the idea fascinated me. This was the first thing I could really understand. Magic as a science, and mathematics as the key to it.

"The merit of calculus," Uriel concluded, "is that it expresses concisely and accurately what verbal equivalents only approximate. Accuracy is what is needed, accuracy and limitation. How many times have you summoned something, a glass, say, from the kitchen, only to have your table littered with glasses? Accuracy. Accuracy and limitation. If you want to improve your formulae, know your calculus."

He turned to the blackboard, scribbled a formula on it, and the blackboard disappeared. Just like that—without smoke, curtains or prestidigitation. I blinked. There

was a smattering of applause. He nodded and trotted off the stage.

Ariel was clapping beside me.

"They didn't seem to like that very much," I whispered.

"Oh, they're too lazy to learn anything that complicated. It's a wonderful work, really, and Uriel's a dear, getting up every year and trying to help them. But they just laugh at him behind his back."

Those who had not sneaked out during Uriel's talk were getting up to leave. The morning session was over. We got up, too. I walked, dazed, into the corridor with Ariel. I didn't believe it. I tried to convince myself that I didn't believe it. But I had heard it and seen it. These weren't stage magicians with their illusions and distracting patter. They were the real thing—in the middle of the Twentieth Century.

And they were less suspected than if they had met atop Brocken on Walpurgis Night.

III

"**A**RIEL!" I said. "*Ariel!*" She was getting away from me, and she was my one bridge to reality. "I've got to talk with you."

"My company comes high," she said.

I frowned. "How much?"

"A steak," she said. "About that thick." She held out her fingers, two inches apart.

"Sold." A good deal all around.

There were fifty people waiting for the elevators. "Let's walk," Ariel suggested.

We started down the stairs.

"What's to stop me from telling the world?" I asked abruptly.

"Who'd believe you?"

"Nobody," I said gloomily.

I awoke to the fact that we had been walking down the steps for a long time—and I saw that they continued downward, without turning, until they vanished in the murk of the distance. I looked back the way we had come. The steps went up and up, unending. The walls were smooth and unbroken.

Panicky, I turned to Ariel. "Where the hell are we?" I asked.

"Oh, dear!" she said, looking around. "It looks very much like a trap."

"A trap?" I almost shouted.

"A maze." She caught my hand and patted it. "There's nothing to be alarmed about. It's very simple. We'll just have to sit down until I can get my bearings. People have starved in these, of course, but there's really no danger as long as you keep your head."

She sank down on a step. I collapsed beside her. She took some bobby pins out of her hair and began to bend them.

"You can talk if you wish," she said, her hands busy, "it won't disturb me."

"How long have people been able to do things like this?" I asked shakily.

"Not long. Unless you count the Chaldeans and the Minoans, and we can't be certain about them. In recorded history, it has been a haphazard business. Someone might stumble on the right formula and procedure, but he wouldn't tell, and the knowledge would die with him. The groundwork wasn't laid until my father and Uriel began experimenting with mathematical expressions of old spells."

"How did the rest of them get into the act?"

"Uriel wanted to give it to the world, publish it in a mathematical journal, you know—that sort of thing. But Father said they would be laughed at and locked up. He wanted everything investigated and documented before they disclosed anything. So he and Uriel recruited a few trusted friends and formed the society to compare results and present papers and decide policy."

I LOOKED far down the steps and shivered. "Nice friends."

"It grew," she said ruefully. "One member would present a friend of his for consideration. And then there have always been a certain number of practicing magicians and witches, in any period. Not adepts, you understand, but getting results occasionally. They

found out about the society. It couldn't be hidden from them. They demanded admittance, and Father decided it would be better to have them where they could be watched, and where they would have to obey the rules. But . . ."

She stopped. I looked up. Her eyes were filled with tears. I handed her my handkerchief. She wiped her eyes and smiled at me as she handed it back.

"That was silly," she said.

"No, it was natural. Go on."

"But it didn't work out that way. Gradually the others took control and turned the society in other directions. Now it's just a social group, without any real power, and the Art is used for all sorts of personal gratifications. So, last year Father, as Magus, proposed that it was time to make the Art public. Private research had done its part. The Art could best be furthered by general participation and discussion. He was voted down. He gave them an ultimatum. He would give them a year to think about it. If they didn't agree in that time, he and Uriel would reveal it."

"And then?" I prompted.

"A month later he died."

"Murder?" I exclaimed.

"You couldn't pin it down—he just seemed to wither away," she said. "Come on."

She got up. In her hands was a V-shaped wire, made of bobby

pins twisted together. She held the two ends, muttered something under her breath and walked up a few steps, holding the wire stiffly out in front of her. Or, maybe it was pulling her.

She stopped and turned toward one blank wall. I scrambled up after her, just in time to see her step through the wall. I stared at the wall with startled eyes. I was alone.

A white hand reached out from the wall, like the Lady in the Lake reaching up for Excalibur. It took my hand and led me forward. I closed my eyes. When I opened them, I was in the hotel lobby.

I looked back. The open stairs went up to a landing, turned and ascended toward the mezzanine. I faced Ariel. My knees were trembling, but I managed to keep my voice steady. "What would have happened if we had continued going down?"

But that was one question she refused to answer.

ARIEL got her steak. It was broiled, medium-rare, and she ate with an appetite that was a pleasure to watch. I was growing quite fond of Ariel. She was pretty, talented, natural . . .

I started talking, quickly. I had remembered her talent. "People don't just wither away," I said.

"Just before he died, Father told Uriel that somebody had said a Mass of St. Sébastien for him. But

his mind was wandering by then."

"A what?"

"A black mass. He said he'd been wrong—that they should have given the Art to the world as soon as they'd had proof."

"Or, better yet, burned it," I said gloomily.

"They thought of that. But somebody else would have discovered it—somebody less scrupulous, like some of the people who wormed their way into the society."

I returned to her father. The subject had a horrible fascination for me. "Can they do that? Make a man wither away?"

She shrugged. "Father was always so careful. He burned his nail clippings and hair combings. We haven't dared experiment with things like that, Gabriel, but some—"

"My name isn't Gabriel," I said firmly. "It's—"

"Sh-h-h!" she said, looking around fearfully. "You mustn't speak your real name. Anyone who knows it has power over you. That must have been what happened to Father. Several people knew his name. One of them must have mentioned it."

"To whom?"

She looked cautiously around the restaurant again. "To Solomon. He was always Father's chief rival, and he was the leader of the party that opposed making the Art pub-

lic. And now that Father is dead, Solomon has made himself Magus. No one will ever again suggest releasing the Art."

"But couldn't somebody talk? Couldn't you and Uriel tell the newspapers or somebody?"

She grew pale. "Oh, we *couldn't*! You don't know what Solomon could do! Only Father had a chance of defying him, and Father is dead. Did you notice how feeble Uriel looked today. I'm scared, Gabriel. If Uriel goes, I'll be all alone."

"But if you had his name," I said slowly, "you'd have a weapon against him. He would be helpless."

"That's right," she said eagerly. "Could you do that? Could you find out his name, Gabriel? I'd pay you. I'd—"

I frowned. "What do you think I am?"

She paused, as if she were considering the question for the first time. "I don't know," she said quietly. "What are you?"

"A private detective," I told her. "And I've got a client."

"It isn't Solomon, is it?" she asked quickly.

I thought about it for a moment and shook my head. "No, it isn't Solomon."

"Then couldn't you do this, too? What does your other client want?"

"The same as you."

"Then it wouldn't hurt to tell me, would it, Gabriel?" she said anxiously. "Please, Gabriel." Her blue eyes pleaded with me. I looked into them as long as I dared. My eyes fell away.

"I guess not," I said.

She breathed again. "Who is your other client?"

I shrugged. "A Mrs. Peabody. A little old lady. Know her?"

SHE shook her head impatiently. "It could be anybody. Don't you see? We all go under assumed names when we're together, and most of us change our appearances, too, so that we won't be recognized."

I sat up straight. "You mean that you don't really look like this?"

"Oh, not me," she said quickly. "Everybody knows me."

"That makes it even tougher to pin down Solomon. No name—no face. If we assume he's American, male and adult, we only have about sixty million people to choose from." Suddenly I snapped my fingers and got up.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Got an idea," I told her.

I breezed into the lobby and up to the desk. Charlie looked up respectfully, but his face fell into more familiar lines as he recognized me.

"The fellow who told you how to put that notice on the board,"

I said, "is he registered here?"

Charlie scowled at me. "Tricks?" he said.

"No tricks. Scout's honor!"

"Penthouse," he said.

"How'd he register?"

Charlie shuffled through a stack of cards and flipped one out on the desk. I looked at it hopefully. Then my heart sank down in the pit of my stomach. In bold black letters on the card was written the name—*Solomon Magus*.

He was bold and confident. He flaunted himself and the society in the face of the world, sure of its blindness. But did his daring approach the foolhardy? Was he getting overbold, overconfident? It was a key to his character. It might be the key to his downfall. I wondered what he was building himself up to.

"Thanks," I said, and went back to Ariel. "What was the meaning of that trap?" I asked. "Why did they do it?"

She put down her coffee cup. "That was a warning."

"To you or to me?"

"I'd thought it was to me," she said slowly. "But now . . ."

"Yeah," I said. "Be good or else."

"What are you going to do?"

Ariel asked, her eyes fixed on me.

"I don't like warnings," I told her.

Ariel and I parted, after agreeing that it would be safer if we

weren't seen together again. I sat through the afternoon program alone. It made a difference.

I was more attentive and more frightened. Magic! It was real and prosaic, and the latter was the more frightening. It was a casual everyday thing, done by the light of the sun—they accepted it, like the water that comes out of a pipe when you twist a faucet, or the lights that come on when you flick a switch.

A MAN talked about familiars and their practical uses. An unseen hand turned the pages of his manuscript. A glass raised itself to his mouth. I thought to myself that it could have been done just as easily, perhaps with less effort, by hand.

"Proof!" someone shouted from the audience.

Solomon was beside the speaker. He was lean, dark and compelling. "Will the person who spoke stand and make his objection clear?"

Uriel stood up. I saw his pink bald spot gleaming. "What proof does the speaker have of the existence of familiars? Where does this mysterious intelligence come from?"

"You've just seen . . ." the speaker began, motioning to the glass and the manuscript.

"Telekinesis!" Uriel scoffed. "Anyone here could do that with-

out predicating a familiar."

The leaves of the manuscript fluttered wildly. The glass rose in the air, spun rapidly and dropped gently to the lectern.

"Child's play," Uriel snorted.

"What point do you wish to make?" Solomon asked, frowning.

"I wish to register a protest against the trend of this 'convention,' as you insist on calling it. Covens—familiars. Is this the type of research the society should approve? Is this the kind of investigation the society was set up to consider? It smacks, sir, of rank superstition."

A murmur ran through the audience.

"Then you do not believe in the spirit world?" Solomon asked with open malice.

"No, sir," Uriel said. "I do not. And I do not believe in slipshod investigations and wild surmises without any scientific basis. I ask a vote of disapproval."

Solomon looked out over the audience with a dark cold eye. "Is there a second?"

A moment of silence was broken by a voice I recognized. "I second the motion," someone said. It was Ariel.

A brief smile twisted Solomon's lips. "All in favor," he said.

Two voices were raised. I sat back, silent and afraid.

"It seems," Solomon said, smiling more broadly, "that the motion has failed."





Alexander Hamilton's corbie turned out to be a cat, and Alexander Hamilton an English witch, in Lothian. The speaker used it as a take-off point for a general summary of divining and augury. Undaunted, Uriel rose to protest against the unwarranted assumption that the future can be known, that such medieval ideas had any validity.

"Proof," he demanded. "*Proof!*"

Solomon thanked him for his contribution. The audience chuckled. It was obvious that whatever prestige Uriel had was vanishing under Solomon's treatment.

"Now," said Solomon, "perhaps



we can give Uriel some of the proof he has been demanding."

I realized, with a shock, that the next speaker's subject was LYCANTHROPY — A DEMONSTRATION.

He brought props with him—some oddly shaped lights, which were plugged in but not turned on, and a dark frightened young man, whom he installed in a chair at the back of the stage.

After going through a historical discussion of lycanthropy and the geographical distribution of the supposed myth, he described his research into the possible truth of the phenomena. He had found a subject in one of his own classes who confessed to strange appetites and stranger dreams. One evening, by the light of the full moon, the speaker saw the subject change.

IN order to make this demonstration, the speaker had duplicated with these lights the constituent parts of the moonlight which stimulated the cell changes. He motioned the young man to the front of the stage. The subject obeyed with the gait of a sleepwalker.

"Watch carefully!" the speaker said. And he flicked on the lights.

As the young man was bathed in silver, Uriel was on his feet, protesting. The growing murmur of the audience drowned him out.

Because the young man was changing . . .

His dark face grew darker and sharper. His jaw thrust forward horribly. As his arms and legs shriveled and shortened, he dropped to all fours. He was hairy. He shook himself free from his encumbering clothes, and the wide mouth in the pointed muzzle opened to let a long tongue loll out between sharp white teeth. His eyes gleamed redly in the odd light. A growl started deep in his throat. He crouched.

A woman screamed.

And he sprang — he sprang straight for Uriel!

There was shouting and scurrying and the crashing of upset chairs as people jumped aside. Uriel stood straight and unafraid, a small white-haired figure, oddly courageous and alone. He pointed a finger at the leaping wolf and muttered something I couldn't hear.

The animal crashed into an unseen wall. He dropped among the chairs, tried to get up and failed, and lay among the splintered furniture, snarling at his left hind leg. The leg was obviously broken. The wolf whimpered as it touched the leg with its muzzle. It was a strange pitiful sound.

Uriel bent over the animal and marked a few symbols on the floor with a piece of chalk. There was

no longer a wolf on the floor. In its stead was the young man, naked, his face twisted with pain.

Crouching beside him, Uriel drew a broken line on the floor, marked out a mathematical formula and joined the broken line with another chalk mark. A look of dazed relief spread over the young man's face. He felt his leg incredulously. It was no longer crooked.

URIEL helped the man to his feet, whispered a few words in his ear, patted him on the arm and motioned toward the door. The man left, glancing back fearfully. Uriel's face, as he turned it toward the stage, was stern and hard. No one had moved. No one could move.

"This has summed up the present leadership of the society," he said grimly. His high-pitched voice had deepened. "A morbid delving into mysteries better left untouched. A wanton disregard for the sacred rights of the individual. A degradation of precious talents and knowledge.

"Lycanthropy! A psychological state associated with hysteria—a pathological condition of depraved appetite. In this case, abetted by hypnosis and sorcery. It is a matter of record that the Malays often induced lycanthropy in such persons of extreme suggestibility, who

were known as *latah*. They will torture that boy no more."

He turned to the audience. "Will you approve this, too?"

They moved uneasily, but no one spoke. A few glanced toward the stage, where Solomon leaned against the lectern, staring down calmly, undisturbed.

Uriel swung back, his lip curling. He pointed a finger at Solomon. The Magus straightened quickly. Uriel laughed.

"You needn't worry. I won't use my power against my fellow man except in self-defense." But Uriel gave the last words peculiar emphasis. "You think you are wise—you are foolish. You think you know everything—you know nothing. As the surviving co-founder of this society, I disavow your leadership. I disavow the society. And I leave you this thought to consider—I will not permit the Art to be used for evil."

He turned and stalked out of the room, small and defiant. As I watched, uncertain, Ariel followed, calling, "Uriel, Uriel!"

At the door she turned. "You cowards!" she said. Before she hurried after the little mathematician, her eyes met mine appealingly.

Appealingly. What did she want of me? That I find out the name of the mysterious Solomon? Or something more?

WHILE I thought about it, the meeting broke up. Some of the audience walked toward the door in little groups, talking excitedly. A few of them gathered around the stage, around Solomon. The red-headed La Voisin was among them. Her figure was magnificent—her hair was striking—her face exquisite. But they no longer appealed to me. I compared them unfavorably with the figure and face of a girl who was only pretty, but who was real.

I noticed, too late, that I was sitting all alone in the room save for the group on the stage. It was too late, because Solomon's intense black eyes were fixed on me curiously, even as he was talking to the others. He broke off.

"Sir," he said, not raising his voice, but projecting it at me so that it seemed to come from a few feet away, "we would be honored if you would join us."

Join them! It was the last thing in the world I wanted to do, in either sense, but it would be the most dangerous kind of cowardice to break for the door.

"The honor," I said, "is mine."

I walked toward the stage, feeling myself dissected by the gaze of the four men and the one woman gathered there. The woman's eyes held a kind of personal inquisitiveness that seemed to me

colder than the more casual curiosity of the rest.

"Gabriel, eh?" Solomon mused when I was close enough for my badge to be read.

La Voisin looked surprised. "But I thought—" She stopped abruptly.

I was glancing at her name card. It was difficult to read. Her magnificent bosom tilted the card almost horizontal, but I made out the first name—*Catherine*. Catherine La Voisin—it still meant nothing to me.

"You thought what, my dear?" Solomon asked, beating me to it.

"I thought Gabriel would be rather different," she went on smoothly. Her eyes narrowed speculatively as she looked at me with open erotic interest.

But that wasn't what she had been about to say—and we all knew it.

"Well, Gabriel," Solomon said, "what is your opinion of this afternoon's activities?"

"Very interesting," I said.

He smiled with real amusement. Perhaps, he enjoyed this verbal swordplay. Or, perhaps, he was contemplating the fate he had planned for me.

"But not as noncommittal as your answer. The issue has been joined. The body of the society against one old man and a young girl. The question is—where do you stand?"

"Where I have always stood."

"Which side are you on?" Catherine inquired.

I looked at her and smiled. "On my own, of course."

"Of course," Solomon said, leaning lazily against the lectern, looking down at me. He gave Catherine a quick, reproving glance. "But in this case, self-interest should ally you with the side that will win. There can't be any doubt about that. And, at the risk of being melodramatic, we must insist that all those who are not for us are against us."

I shrugged. "Understandable. But in a case of this kind, superior numbers do not always indicate superior forces. It seems to me that the issue is still in doubt."

SOLOMON'S eyes glittered. "Your name seems to place you on the side of the angels. But names have ceased to mean anything. My admiration for your independence would torment me if we were forced to strike blindly. But, perhaps, you could give us some reason to trust you."

"Like what?"

"Like, say," he appeared to reflect, "like your real name."

"Certainly," I agreed. "Providing you give me the same reason to trust you. Starting with—" I let my eye roam around the group—"starting with you, Magus."

Solomon laughed. "You are a

clever man, Gabriel—and a bold one. I hope you choose the right side. It would be a shame to—lose you."

"When the time comes," I said slowly, "you'll find me on the winning side."

I nodded to them all, turned and left. I walked quickly to the door and through it.

"Gabriel!" someone said huskily behind me.

I stopped and turned, shivers running up and down my spine. It was Catherine La Voisin, gliding toward me like the figurehead on a sailing ship.

"Gabriel," she repeated. She stopped only when she was close to me—very close. "You interest me, Gabriel. There is something very real and male about you."

I wanted to say that there was something very unreal and female about her, but her nearness left me speechless.

"Are you—perhaps—undisguised?" she asked. She pressed closer.

"Perhaps," I said. It came out in a kind of gasp. Two firm breasts were trying to bore their way into my chest.

"I like you, Gabriel," she breathed. Her lips came up toward mine.

I looked at them as they approached me like rippling red snakes, held in a sort of frozen fascination. They blurred. My gaze shifted upward to her eyes.

They were bottomless, like dark-blue lakes.

Her lips met mine with an electric tingling. They moved restlessly. My arms went around her automatically. I felt her hand work up the back of my neck into my hair. I struggled to breathe.

After an eon, she moved slowly back, her eyes heavy-lidded and sleepy. I took a deep breath.

"What was that for?" I gasped.

She was walking away from me down the corridor. Her head turned to look back over her shoulder. "That," she said, smiling slowly, "was by way of being a preview."

An elevator door opened in front of her and she stepped in. As the doors closed she was still looking at me, and her smile was strangely triumphant.

I breathed deeply again, feeling oddly unclean. I reached for my handkerchief and scrubbed my lips with it, and the three men who had been with Solomon passed me, smirking. When I took the handkerchief away, it was stained with orange smears, and the three men were gone.

I WAITED a few minutes more, but Solomon didn't come out. I glanced quickly into the Crystal Room. It was empty—very empty. It felt hollow. The chandeliers had stopped tinkling.

I walked uneasily to the only other door in the room, the one

back of the stage, hesitated in front of it and finally pulled it open, stiffening myself for a shock. But the little room beyond was empty, too. Opposite me, another door opened into a large central kitchen and serving area. Naked stairs went up and down.

I stepped into the little room and closed the door slowly behind me. I couldn't visualize the elegant Solomon trotting up or down the service stairs. But then he hadn't come out by the main door. He had either gone through here or . . . Speculation like this was futile. It was time I stopped playing someone else's game and began playing my own, such as it was.

I looked around the room. Solomon had been here. Some of the others, too, but Solomon I knew about. Except for an empty coat and hatrack, the room was bare. I moved the rack a few inches and noticed something on the floor. I picked it up. It was a rectangular piece of paper. I turned it over. It was a return-trip ticket to Washington, D. C., dated the day before yesterday.

I shrugged. Maybe, maybe not. I slipped it into my coat pocket. I searched the rest of the room carefully, but it was obviously wasted energy. I went back into the Crystal Room and looked on the platform and around it and finally noticed a small yellow corner of

something sticking out from under the black drapes at the back. I pulled it out. It was a blank manila binder, enclosing a thick manuscript of about seventy-five pages, handwritten in a precise, readable script. It was littered with formulas. The first one was—

$$\lim_{\Delta x \rightarrow 0} \frac{f(x + \Delta x) - f(x)}{\Delta x}$$

I vaguely recognized the formula. It had something to do with what was called the derivative, an abstract limit. It had been a long time since I'd taken calculus, and I had never been a star pupil in mathematics. But I knew whose manuscript it was. It belonged to Uriel.

There was nothing else under the platform or in the room, and I went out into the corridor, with the manuscript under my arm, and waited ten minutes for an elevator. It would be months before I would trust stairs again. I stepped out into the lobby and registered for a room. Solomon had me spotted, and I had a strong suspicion that it wouldn't do me any good to run now, even if I wanted to. But it was time I learned the rules of the game.

Charlie was off duty, and the clerk at the desk was an obliging young man.

"Say," I said, turning back to the desk as if on impulse, "have

you got a girl registered here? A girl named Ariel?"

"Ariel who?"

I shrugged and put on a sly, man-to-man smile. "Hell, I didn't catch her last name."

He shuffled through the recent cards. "Not today," he said.

"Well," I ventured, "what about an old boy named Uriel."

He stopped being so obliging. "Ariel—Uriel? What's the gag?"

"Well," I said desperately, "what about a little old lady, a Mrs. Peabody?"

He turned away with a withering look of disgust.

I trudged to the elevator, feeling like a man who sits down to a game of poker and finds that everything is wild except the cards he happens to hold. I went up to the seventh floor and walked down the hall to my room. I unlocked the door, opened it and stepped into a bottomless black pit through which I went falling, falling, falling . . .

I was spinning, my arms and legs reaching desperately for handholds and footholds in the formless night, cartwheeling madly through the lightless void.

This isn't real, I told myself, but the thought was twisted away from me by a cold rushing wind. *Illusion!* I clung desperately to the thought.

Panic tried to force sounds past

the tightening muscles of my throat. Tension was growing into rigidity. Through the gathering block, I pushed one sane thought — *if this is illusion, if I am not really falling, I am standing just inside the door, and the light switch is to my right against the wall.*

It's a lie, my reeling senses told me. But I hugged the thought tightly, and my flailing hand reached out, grabbed frantically and—

The lights came on. I was standing just inside the door, looking into an ordinary room, and wondering if I wasn't going mad.

I stepped inside and looked back. On the floor, was a piece of shiny black glass, about two feet square. I leaned over and dug a finger between the glass and the carpet and picked it up. I looked into it.

It wasn't black glass. It was a mirror, but it wasn't silvered. Instead, the back was painted a shiny black. My face, square and craggy, looked back at me darkly. It almost seemed like another person. I shuddered and turned it over. Scratched in the paint around the edge, was an endless string of kabbalistic letters, similar to the ones I had noticed on the seal. I pulled the program out of my pocket and compared the two. They were the same letters, but not in the same order.

I walked to the far wall and

leaned the glass carefully against it with the mirror face turned away from me. After a few minutes, I stopped shaking.

I slumped into a chair, suddenly aware that I was more tired than I could remember being. Shaking my head incredulously, I let the day's happenings pass in review. But every time disbelief grew too great, I glanced at the black square I had placed against the wall.

I WAS enmeshed in a fantastic cobweb of magic and witchcraft. The only way to pull loose was to find out who these people really were and where they hid.

Who was Mrs. Peabody, the little old lady who had drawn me into this with a crisp green lure? Was she working against Solomon? Did Ariel and Uriel have an unknown ally? Was she one of Solomon's own confederates, seeking protection, or trying to take his place? Or had it only been a trick by Solomon, safe in his anonymity, to use me against an undetermined third party?

Who was the red witch, Catherine La Voisin?

Who was Ariel? Who was Uriel? Could I trust them to be as frank and honest as they seemed? A witch and a sorcerer?

And, above all, who was Solomon?

I was fighting shadows. I was

the blind man in a game of blind man's buff. If I could only tear aside the blinders for a moment and see a face . . .

What had been the purpose of the black mirror? Another warning? Had it said, *be careful or something really deadly may happen to you?* Or had it been an attempt that failed? That was hard to believe. I didn't know enough to get out of traps.

I'd had enough of stumbling around in the dark. I needed light. I needed knowledge.

I PULLED the bound manuscript out of my pocket, took off my coat and tossed it on the bed. I unstrapped my shoulder holster and hung it over the back of the chair, where the butt was within easy reach of my hand. I stripped off my tie and settled back in the chair.

I leafed through the manuscript, glancing at headings. *Introduction* — *Principles*; — *Equipment*; — *Simple Spells*; — *Counter-Spells*; — *Teleportation*; — *Illusions*; — *Disguises*; — *Medical and other Practical Applications*. The last section was entitled *Ethics*.

I went back to the introduction and began to read carefully. The material had been worked and reworked, simplified and boiled down, fitted into a theoretical framework. A collection of diverse phenomena had been noted, their

similarities observed, a hypothesis derived to explain them. The hypothesis had been tested, changed and retested, until the theory was evolved and proved sound. In other words, a scientific mind had been at work and had developed, out of discredited phenomena, a working science.

Unfortunately, the manuscript had not been written as a textbook. Most of the connective and explanatory material had been omitted. It was a notebook filled with personal jottings, perfectly comprehensible to the author, who supplied the background material and examples automatically, but only half-meaningful to the casual reader. And the examples that were given led inevitably to mathematical formulations, usually in calculus, which were incomprehensible.

But my time was not completely wasted. Uriel's basic theory postulated a store of energy ordinarily unavailable to our world. It existed in a place which was undefinable except in mathematical terms, although it might be inaccurately termed a co-existent universe, parallel with ours, or some verbal equivalent which was equally descriptive and equally inaccurate.

The idea was not absurd. The theory of continuous creation must assume some such energy store. And the theory worked out in practice.

This energy, then, was available. Not by physical means, which were necessarily limited to this place, this universe, this moment. But the mind was unfettered. It could range anywhere, backward, forward, sideways. It could tap that source of energy and channel it into this world.

Minds had tapped it, inefficiently, haphazardly, in the past. Myths and folklore gave us gods and demons and fairies and the spirit-world, and all the rest. The appearance of the energy was fitful and uncertain because it lacked two things—theory and discipline. Where there was no theory there could be no control, and the wrong theory was worse than no theory at all. A disciplined mind was seldom found among the warped personalities of priests, witches, and magicians.

OCCASIONALLY, desire or fear might accidentally work in the proper manner and call forth what the mind wanted or dreaded. Because the energy was formless—the mind was the matrix.

Physical or symbolic devices could help discipline the mind. The best of these was mathematics. It expressed relationships exactly without unfortunate connotations or subconscious responses. And modern developments in mathematics had made possible the conversion of a bastard art into a science.

The extra-mundane energy could be controlled accurately and exactly by use of such mathematical tools as calculus, which took limits—analysis situs (topology), which was concerned with proximity—and tensor analysis (absolute differential calculus), which constructed and discussed relations or laws which were generally covariant, which remained valid, that is, when passing from one to another system of coordinates. By using the proper equations, the mind could be directed toward channeling the desired amount of energy into the desired function.

I looked up from the book, my mind churning with speculations. If this was true, anyone could be a magician. *Anyone!* Even a novice like me.

A luxury hotel is a self-contained city. Anything can happen in one, from rape and murder to conventions of sorcerers, and the outside world need never know. But it has its advantages. All things are possible, not by magic but by the expenditure of strictly mundane energy on the part of the hotel employees and strictly U.S. money on the part of the guest.

I picked up an interesting little device, which is not too far from telepathy and asked for room service. And I gave the girl what was perhaps the oddest order in an interesting history of unusual requests.

"I want a book on the history of magic and witchcraft," I said. "Also, texts on higher mathematics, specifically calculus, analysis situs, and tensor analysis."

"Yes, sir," the girl said. She didn't even ask me to spell anything. "Anything else, sir?"

"A fried ham sandwich on white bread and a cup of coffee."

"Yes, sir," she said. "Is that all sir?"

"Oh," I said, "and a box of chalk."

V

THE first thing I tackled was the ham sandwich. The second was the history of magic, since it looked to be the easiest of the lot. Hunger appeased, a trifle more alert, I skimmed through the book and came out with some orientation and the answers to a few questions.

The Magus, for instance, had taken his name from the great source of Medieval magic, Solomon. The Biblical king enjoyed a posthumous reputation as the greatest of wizards. The angel Raphael, it was believed, had brought him a magical ring from God, which wielded control over all demons. Some of them, Solomon put to work building the Temple—the more intractable, he imprisoned in brazen vessels which he threw into a Babylonian lake.

Solomon was wise and powerful, and there was a certain darkness about his later years. Only magic could account for it. The great search for his secret books was on.

The most important to turn up thus far was the Key of Solomon, which contained detailed descriptions of the preparations and ceremony for summoning demons—and for dismissing them. The instructions were so detailed that it was little wonder the magicians did not succeed. They could try until they died of senile decay, without losing hope or faith in Solomon.

Christianity brought in other, darker elements. What may have seemed a search for knowledge—and hidden wealth—became a dedication to evil. Magic became witchcraft. The summoning of demons became a pact with Satan himself.

Ariel and Uriel, like Gabriel, were angels, but Catherine La Voisin was a professional palmist and clairvoyant during the reign of Louis XIV. She secretly sold love and death charms to her clients. Besides being a witch, she was a poisoner and was involved in a lewd, bloody Amatory Mass said over Madame de Montespan, the king's favorite, and eventually in an attempt to poison the king.

What a lovely namesake, I thought, for the red-haired witch.

I plowed my way through dif-

ferential and integral calculus, and Uriel's formulas became a little more meaningful. With a briefer perusal of the elements of analysis situs and tensor analysis, I surrendered to a feeling of mastery.

If Uriel's manuscript was what it pretended to be, I was now qualified to work magic. I decided to try. What should I start with? I remembered how one of the speakers had summoned a cold drink. I thought thirstily of a nice cold mint julep, but I pushed the idea back hastily. I wanted nothing so complicated for my first attempt. I settled for an ordinary highball—bourbon and soda.

I LEAFED through Uriel's manuscript until I came to the section headed *Simple Spells*, studied it for a moment, then turned to *Equipment*. The only essential, it said, was a piece of chalk, and that was only an aid to concentration in jotting down equations. But it was also helpful to have an element of similarity, if the mind was not accustomed to thinking in mathematical terminology.

I got a water glass from the bathroom, poured a little water into it and set it on the desk. Beside it, I chalked a small circle and jotted down the prescribed equation.

I repeated the equation aloud, linking the unknowns to the object

I wanted and the place I wanted it.

In the beginning, the manuscript read, verbal equivalents are sometimes helpful.

"Highball, highball," I chanted, feeling more than a little silly, "come to me, come to Casey Kingman, who is in room 707 of —"

There was a glass in the circle. An instant before, it had not been there. I stared at it, wide-eyed. I had done it! I had worked magic—or, perhaps I had practiced a new science.

I picked up the glass with trembling hand and raised it to my lips and let a little roll over my tongue. *Phew-w-!* I spat it out. The bourbon was lousy and the soda was water and the water was hot.

I put the glass down, feeling greatly chastened. Obviously I was not yet an adept.

I needed somebody, somebody to talk to, somebody to answer questions. The only one I knew who would talk to me was Ariel. I had no idea where she was, what room she was in, whether she was staying in the hotel at all. Could I bring her here? I could try.

I had to have a link. I thought about it for a moment before my eyes saw the coat on the bed. Girls always left hairs on flannel coats. Sometimes make-up, too. But always hairs.

I picked it up. There were hairs. One was long and red. I rolled it up between my fingers and was

about to throw it away, when I had a second thought. I straightened it out carefully, folded it, slipped it into a hotel envelope, put the envelope in my inside coat pocket. There were some short, blond hairs, but they were mine. Finally, I found one that was long and dark.

I held it in my hand, thoughtfully. Could I do a better job of it this time? Was there any danger to Ariel if I muffed again? I decided there wasn't. The worst that could happen would be the summoning of some other girl—Catherine La Voisin, say. I shivered. That would be bad enough.

THIS time I wasn't leaving anything to chance. I got a cake of soap from the bathroom and started to work on it with my pen-knife. In fifteen minutes I had a surprisingly good model of a reclining nude. Not Ariel, of course. But I could take care of that. I moistened the top of the figure's head, coiled the hair by drawing it between two fingernails, then stuck it to the damp soap.

I referred to the section on teleportation as I knelt on the floor. I drew a circle on the rug, placed the figurine inside the circle and chalked an equation around it.

I stood up and compared it with the instructions. It checked. "X is for Ariel," I muttered, "Y is this spot in my room." I re-

cited the equation aloud. "Wherever you are, Ariel, come to me. Come to this spot. Appear in this circle. Ariel, come to me . . ."

Air fanned my face. My eyes, fixed on the circle, saw a pair of small, bare white feet. Somebody gasped. I looked up quickly. It was Ariel, all right. All of her, and not much more. Her eyes were wide and blue and startled. My eyes, no doubt, were startled, too, because it was obvious that Ariel had just stepped out of a shower.

The *not much more* was a towel, which she draped hastily in front of her. She let out her breath and it sounded like relief. I sank back in the chair, speechless and suddenly weak, but interested in the fact that my earlier impression of her charming figure had been vindicated.

I wished fervently for a breeze. The wind whistled past my head and whipped the towel aside.

Ariel clutched at it desperately with both hands, looking annoyed. But it was slowly replaced by a grudging smile.

She picked up the soap figurine, muttered a few words and disappeared—towel, figurine and all.

Belatedly, I found my voice. "Ariel, Ariel," I called after her. "Where can I find you? Where can I . . . ?"

But it was no use. She was gone. And, with her, she had taken my last hope of getting the answers.

FIFTEEN minutes later, I remembered the handkerchief. I pulled it out, remembering how it had wiped her tears away as we sat on the stairs that led nowhere. I stared at the orange smears. All my ventures into magic had been bungled. It would be just my luck to summon the carnivorous Catherine La Voisin. And, this time, she might have her poison with her.

But I had summoned Ariel once, I thought with growing determination.

I could do it again.

The circle and the equation were still on the floor. They had worked once. I saw no reason why they shouldn't serve a second time. I dropped the handkerchief in the center of the circle, took the glass of water that stood on the desk, sprinkled the handkerchief gently with it.

"Ariel, Ariel," I said, "by the tears you shed into this handkerchief, come now to claim it, come here to me once more . . ."

This time I was not so surprised when Ariel appeared. She was more modestly clad in a nightgown—but not by much. Her hair was brushed dark beauty around her shoulders. I took a deep, quick breath. Perfume! She was infinitely desirable. She was almost beautiful.

Did she always wear so flattering and revealing a nightgown?

Did she always put on perfume when she went to bed? I chided myself for my suspicions.

Ariel frowned. "I don't know how you've become adept so quickly, Gabriel, but this business must end. It's very disconcerting, being whisked around, not knowing whether you'll be here or there the next moment. Besides, what will people say? What will the house detective say?"

I began to laugh. I couldn't help it. There was witchcraft in the Crystal Room—witchcraft and werewolves, magic and murder—and she was worried about house detectives and minor indiscretions.

Her frown twisted as she tried to keep a straight face, but then she was laughing, too. I noticed that she was looking down at her feet, and my laughter died.

I jumped to my feet. "Stop! Don't go away! I've got to talk to you."

"Well," she said, "I'm not going to talk standing in the middle of the room. Let me out."

"Let you out?" I repeated blankly.

She pointed down at her feet. "The circle," she said impatiently. "I can't get out until it's broken"

I rubbed out a chalked arc with my shoe, and she brushed past me in a delicate cloud of black lace and fragrance. I breathed deeply and turned toward her, but she was looking back toward the cir-

cle, her eyes on the handkerchief. I leaned over quickly, picked it up and started to stuff it in my pocket.

She held out her hand, snapping her fingers meaningfully. Slowly, reluctantly, I pulled the square of linen out and tossed it to her. I shrugged as she spread it flat and stared at the orange smears. She frowned for a moment and then her face crumpled.

"Oh," she wailed, turning blindly toward the bed. "You've been with that redheaded witch, kissing her, making love to her. You've gone over to their side!" She fell on the bed, sobbing.

I SAT down on the edge of the bed and patted her shaking shoulder. It was a very nice shoulder. I liked patting it. "I wouldn't get within ten feet of her," I said, shuddering. "Once is too much. Besides, she isn't my type."

She moved away from my hand. "Don't touch me," she said savagely. And then, more softly. "What is your type?"

I thought about it, and it came as a revelation to me. "A girl with dark hair," I said, "and blue eyes—about your size . . ."

She sat up, brushing her tears away with the back of her hand. If I could have kept my eyes off the nightgown, and kept from remembering what the towel had failed to conceal, I would have

thought she looked like a little girl. But there was no chance of that.

Her eyes were bright and blue, undimmed by tears. "Am I, really?"

I nodded. I said, "Tell me what's happened? What is Uriel going to do?"

"He's staying. He's going to help. He swears he'll strip Solomon of his powers. The werewolf was a terrible mistake."

"What do you mean?"

"If that attempt to kill Uriel hadn't been so obvious, I don't think he'd ever have done anything about the situation. He's always gone out of his way to avoid trouble. As long as he could convince himself that things weren't too bad, he was willing to let them go along any way they would. But now he's made up his mind, and he's the best of the lot. None of them can touch him."

"But there's just the two of you?" I asked. "Just you and Uriel?"

She nodded.

"That's tough odds," I said slowly.

"And Uriel's not well," she said thoughtfully. "He scoffs at the idea of the Mass of St. Sécaire. Superstition, he says. But he knows he could do something similar if he wanted to. He's tried to protect himself with counter-spells, but they're only really effective when he's concentrating on them, and

he has to sleep sometime."

"Well," I said, "now there's three of us."

I was rewarded with a glance of pure gratitude. "Thank you—Gabriel," she said. "Did you—did you have any luck in finding out Solomon's name?"

I shook my head. "All I found was this," I said. I pulled the railroad ticket out of my coat pocket. "And I can't swear it was Solomon's."

SHE took the ticket, looked at it carefully, then shrugged as she handed it back. "That doesn't seem to be much help, but keep it. It might fit in with something else." Suddenly she stiffened. She was staring at something across the room. I turned. She was looking at the back of the mirror I had leaned against the wall.

I walked over to the wall and started to turn the mirror around. "I stepped on it when I came into the room. It gave me the odddest feeling."

"Careful," she said. "That's enough. I've heard of black mirrors, but never saw one before. Someone wants to get rid of you."

"Oh!" I shrugged. "I imagine it was just another warning. The sensation stopped when I turned on the light."

"Don't you believe it," she said earnestly. "You were either very strong or very lucky. In the black

mirror, time is meaningless. A few seconds is like eternity. You could have gone mad. Or, some say, if the mirror is broken while you're trapped, you'll die."

I shivered. This wasn't my kind of danger. I could have faced a dozen ordinary bullets and not felt half so cold.

"But how did they work it?" she went on, frowning. "Do they know your name?" I shook my head. Ariel snapped her fingers. "That witch! When she kissed you, did she run her fingers through your hair?"

"Why—yes," I said. "I guess she did. So what?"

"You poor unsuspecting male," she said, shaking her head sadly. "Did you think she was overcome with your masculinity?"

"Well, as a matter of fact . . ." I began, but she was up and coming toward me. I watched her warily.

"This is what she did." She put her face up and raised her arms and pulled my head down to hers. Our lips met. There was nothing electric about it, but it was much sweeter and more satisfying. I felt my pulses begin to pound. Her hand moved tenderly up my neck into my hair. "*M-m-m!*" she said, her lips half parted.

Finally, she pulled away, her eyes glazed and distant. They snapped back to the present. "Oh, dear!" she said. She held out her

hand to me. "Look!"

I looked. Several of my blond hairs had come away in her hand. I winced. The redheaded witch had something that belonged to me. God knew what she was going to do with it, if she hadn't already done it. "We came out even, then," I said. "I have one of hers."

Her eyes narrowed. "Let me have it," she said eagerly.

I got the envelope from my coat and handed it to her. She stepped back into the circle on the rug, bent and picked up the chalk, drew the arc I had rubbed out and, before I could move or say anything, waved at me and disappeared.

"Hey, wair!" I yelled. "I still don't know where to find you."

That's me. Always too late.

THE insistent ringing of the telephone dragged me up out of a bottomless pool of sleep. I fumbled for the instrument, my eyes still glued shut, and mumbled, "Hello?"

An almost soundless whisper came to my ear. "There is danger. A message is in your box. It would be wise to act on it."

"Hello? Hello?" I said.

The line was silent, but I thought, dazedly, that I could hear someone breathing.

"Who is this?" I said.

There was no answer.

I dropped the phone back into the cradle and rolled over and

went back to sleep. This time I dreamed. I dreamed I was being choked to death by a person who stood behind me and pulled a garrote tighter and tighter around my neck . . . A garrote woven from my own hair. All I could see was a hand out of the corner of my eye, a woman's smooth, white hand, but as I watched, the hand changed into a spotted, wrinkled claw.

I woke up gasping for breath.

I looked at my watch. It was not quite eight, but I was wide-awake. There was no use trying to go back to sleep. I rubbed my neck again. I wasn't sure I wanted to.

I thought of Ariel and smiled. I felt warm inside when I thought about her. She was a nice kid—well, not a kid, exactly. I amended, as I remembered—caught in a worse mess than I was. She was right in the middle of it, and there was no way out. By God—I'd get her out, and then . . .

I caught myself. Poor, frightened girl? She's a witch, a real, honest-to-god witch, and she makes it work. But what a witch! I mused, and sat up straight in bed. Good God! Could I be falling in love with her? I had to admit that I could.

Well, I thought, worse things could happen to a man. Like being strangled with a rope made from his own hair.

I looked at the telephone. A note in my box? I picked up the handset and asked for the desk. Charlie answered.

"How did you get registered here?" he asked indignantly.

"Never mind that," I snapped and thought of a story I could tell him that would make his few remaining hairs stand on end. Charlie and his precious hotel! "Is there a note for me—room 707?"

"As a matter of fact, there is. Want me to read it to you?"

"Isn't it sealed?"

"Just a slip of paper. Not even folded."

"All right. What does it say?"

"On one side it says 707."

"Okay, that's me."

"On the other, it says IIII. Are you playing games again?"

"You're a big help," I told him and hung up.

So there was a message. But had I really received a phone call, telling me it was there? Maybe this magic business had a recoil to it. Maybe my subconscious had reached out to gather that information and then put in a call to my conscious mind.

AND then, of course, my conscious mind had rolled back over and gone to sleep. How did that sound? I thought it stank. Maybe it was coincidence. Or, maybe, somebody *had* called me.

I turned it over and over as

I let a cold shower get me fully awake, shaved hurriedly with a razor I had picked up last night in the hotel drugstore and reluctantly redonned the clothes I had worn yesterday.

Eleven-eleven. Obviously a room number—too obviously. Or was I being too subtle? A room number, then. Whose—Ariel's? That was logical. It could also be a trap.

I shrugged. There was danger in being overcautious, too. I strapped on the shoulder holster and inspected the clip. I felt a little safer. Maybe I was being foolish, but I had a hunch Betsy might come in handy before the day was over. She wasn't subtle, and she didn't know the first thing about magic, but when she spoke, people listened.

I hid Uriel's manuscript, hesitated at the door and returned for a piece of chalk. I jotted an equation across the inside of the threshold. I stepped out into the hall, closed the door behind me and heard it latch. That should keep everybody out, including hotel employees.

I waited a few minutes for an elevator. "Eleven," I called out to the boy. My voice was firm. I was proud of it. The doors opened in front of me, and I stepped out into a corridor just like my own. It was a corner room. I took a deep breath, grabbed the door

knob and turned it. Something snapped. The door swung open.

I looked at the sun-bright room for a long moment before I understood what was going on.

"My God!" I cried, my voice quivering with horror. "Ariel!"

VI

SHE was still in her nightgown, and the face she turned up to me was twisted with guilt and something else. In her hands, as she sat cross-legged upon the floor, was a little waxen figure. Even if I had not seen the blond hairs pressed into the head, I would have known whom the figure was supposed to represent. It was me.

Her hands were still busy, winding darker hairs around the chest of the tiny figure. In the window, directly in the sunlight, were two other figures. One was made of a darker material. Around its chest was a red hair. Next to it, was a wax image that the sun had partially melted into a puddle.

But the strangest part of the scene was Ariel. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, and my throat ached with loving her, and my arms twitched with the desire to gather her into them.

"Oh, no!" I said, and turned away, my hands thrown up to cover my face.

"Wait, Gabriel!" she said urgently, her silence suddenly broken.

"Wait! You don't understand!"

I moved away blindly. She muttered something behind me. I stopped. I couldn't move. I was fixed to the spot, paralyzed. I took my hands away, and I was inside the room with the door closed.

Ariel was standing before me. Her look of guilt had changed to one of annoyance. "Oh, *why* did you have to break in here now?"

"*Ariel!*" I blurted. "Why? *Why* are you doing this? I thought we were working together, and now I find you making wax images of me. It's fantastic. It's terrible. Why are you doing this to me?"

Her annoyance had been replaced by blankness. "What in the name of . . . What do you think I'm doing?"

"Look!" I said, trying to point to the images in the window, and failing. "You've been trying to kill me."

Slowly, irresistibly, a smile spread over her lovely face. She began to laugh. It bubbled out of her uncontrollably. She threw herself across the bed and howled. I watched her with growing irritation as my anger faded. I didn't see anything funny about it.

"Kill you, Gabriel?" she gasped. "Oh, no, Gabriel. Not *you!* Anybody but you."

"Well, then," I snapped, "what's the meaning of all this?"

She sat up in the bed, suddenly sobered, studying my face. "It's a





love-spell," she said, avoiding my eyes.

"A love-spell!" I repeated. And I recognized instantly that it was true. I loved her madly. She was the most precious thing in the world. It would be ecstasy to die for her. "But all these images . . ."

"They were part of it. The wax one there, the one melting in the sun, made your heart soften toward me. The clay image that is hardening hardens your heart against La Voisin. You should have seen me earlier, when I was chanting."

"But why?" I asked. "You didn't have to do that to get me to help you."

"Don't you see?" she said quickly. "I was trying to protect you from La Voisin. When they found out that their mirror trick didn't work, she would have tried a love-spell—an Amatory Mass, rather, since that is the way their minds work. I had to protect you."

I SHUDDERED. In love with Catherine La Voisin! I would rather be in love with a black widow spider. I wasn't sure, either, that my feeling was all due to the clay image.

Ariel muttered something. Suddenly I was free to move.

"You can go now," she said quietly.

I turned toward the door, frowning. I didn't like the way I was being pushed around, bought here, involved there, trapped, my feelings changed, and—

I thought of something else and smiled.

I turned back into the room. Ariel was still sitting on the bed, watching me with his, serious eyes.

I took three steps toward her and gathered her in my arms and kissed her passionately.

She stiffened and struggled impotently, her hands heating a gentle tattoo on my chest. "Stop!" she gasped. "Stop it!"

"I can't," I said. "I can't help myself."

Slowly, she relaxed. Her arms curled around me. We sank down onto the bed. I gathered her in close to me, knowing that I would never be closer to paradise.

Finally, she drew back and sighed. She opened her eyes. "Then you don't mind?" she whispered.

"Mind?" I said. "Beauty is a witch against whose charms faith melteth into blood."

We sank into another rapturous spell, and I discovered that she was proficient in an older and more powerful witchcraft. Finally, she pulled herself away and sat up, straightening her hair. I reached for her again, but she pushed my hands away.

"I can see that I'm going to have trouble with you," she said severely. "The grimoirs and keys and the Faustbooks are so impractical. They never mention this kind of difficulty."

"You have no one to blame but yourself," I pointed out. "You have bewitched me. I am a slave of passion."

"I suppose so," she said moodily, "but do I have to lose my

honor in order to prove it?"

"Is there any danger of that?" I asked quickly.

She caught her breath. "Oh, you know," she said softly. "You know!"

I controlled myself and rolled over, away from her. "Did you work that spell just to save me from La Voisin and a fate worse than death?"

Her eyes widened, innocently. "Why, Gabriel! What other reason would I have?"

I growled and lunged for her, but she jumped off the bed and skipped out of my way, laughing. I was after her instantly, but she was as elusive as a frightened doe.

"You beautiful witch!" I said, panting, as I tried to corner her. "You must have known what would happen when you put your room number in my box."

She stopped. I caught her. I almost ran over her. Only my arms around her kept us both from falling to the floor. Clasped together, swaying, we stood in the middle of the room, her face upturned to mine, wide-eyed and afraid.

"I didn't put anything in your box," she said.

WE were pressed close, but the half-controlled urgency of passion no longer bound us together. Around us, the almost-forgotten night was closing in.

"They must have done it," I said. "At least we have that to thank them for."

"Maybe," she said. She was trembling a little in my arms. "If they did it to drive us apart . . . If they wanted you to find me working spells."

"Why else?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. But I'm afraid."

I bent down and kissed her gently. Her lips were cold. "The frightened witch," I chided. "Don't be afraid. This was their second mistake. They can't beat us now."

She raised her head and smiled. I had another reason to be proud of her.

"Listen," I said. "We need a council of war. Can you get hold of Uriel?" She nodded. "Bring him down to my room, then—707—half an hour. Okay?"

She nodded again. I released her, stepped back and looked at her with fond and possessive eyes. "I love you, Ariel," I said. "I don't think the dolls did it, but I don't care."

"I love you," she whispered, "and there wasn't any witchcraft about that. I'll remove the spell." I shrugged. "No—I want to. Not because of you—for me. I want to be sure it's real. I want you to love me for myself."

"Don't you dare!" I said. I shivered. "Do you think I want to take a chance of losing this—this

way I feel. But," I added wryly, "I'd appreciate it if you'd put those dolls in a safe place. I wouldn't want them to fall into just anybody's hands."

I closed the door gently behind me. I felt too good to wait for the elevator, forgetting my distrust of stairs, and I ran down four flights three steps at a time. I ran out into the hall and slowed to a decorous walk as a well-dressed, elderly couple passed. I could feel them turning to stare at me.

"It's magic," I bumed.

The woman sniffed, audibly.

I reached the door, inserted the key and turned it. Nothing happened. I was startled and glanced at the room number to check, before I remembered my precautions. I took the piece of chalk out of my coat pocket and scribbled another equation on the front of the door. Added together, the two equations canceled each other out. Their sum was zero.

THE door swung open. I scrubbed the figures off both sides of the door with the heel of my hand, stepped into the room and closed the door behind me. I fastened the chain latch. I swung around. The room was just as I had left it, down to the smudged circle on the rug.

I stood there for a moment, reliving the morning's experiences. Things were breaking. We'd win,

now. I had no doubts about that. All that was left was a little detail work.

Ariel! My face flushed warmly as I remembered the beauty of her face, the warm sweetness of her lips, the fire of her body, a perfect blend of youthful firmness and womanly softness. And the wonder of it all—the abiding wonder—was Ariel herself, an understanding, gentle, delightful . . .

I decided I needed a cold shower.

The water was icy. I stood it as long as I could, puffing and blowing and gasping and then reached blindly for the towel. And as I reached, I remembered a feeling of uneasiness that had greeted me when I entered the bathroom. I knew the reason for it now. When I left, the towels had been used and disarranged. When I entered, everything had been straightened up. Someone had been in the room since I left—someone had been in the bathroom . . .

Too late—the towel slipped through my fingers. It coiled itself around my neck. It tightened with the irresistible strength of a boa constrictor. I stumbled out of the shower, tugging at it with both hands, struggling for breath.

I staggered and slipped across the tile floor, my eyes beginning to bulge, the room beginning to turn a little red, the need for air a frantic burning in my chest. It

was useless to struggle with this bewitched thing, but I could not give up. I had too much to live for.

What a fool I was!

Half an hour, I told her, and it hasn't been fifteen minutes. And if she should arrive early, the door is locked and chained. Better to be stupid than half-smart!

The redness darkened. I staggered and almost fell.

I had to think—and I couldn't. The darkness was invading my mind inexorably and, as it closed in, I thought of Ariel, I thought of her sorrow and despair when she saw my body.

And the last light went out.

"WELL, young man," someone said, "are you going to wake up or do I have to drown you?"

I opened my eyes, spluttering and breathed deeply. The air entered my lungs like live steam. I raised my hands and massaged my throat, wincing. It was wet, like my face.

"Ah," said the voice, "that's better." It was a woman's voice. I knew that I should recognize it.

I turned my head over. "You!" I said. It came out in a hoarse croak. She was standing beside the bed, an empty water glass in her hand.

It was Mrs. Peabody. Her gray curls bobbed as she nodded vigorously. "And a lucky thing for you that it was. Another minute,

and you'd have been beyond caring."

I turned my head back and forth, wondering if it was going to fall off. Apparently it wasn't. My circumstances began to interest me a little more.

I was lying on the bed. I was cold. I was also naked, except for the dead towel, which was lying across me, lifeless but strategic.

She chuckled. "Is this the way you greet all your female guests? Well, don't lie there, lewd and naked, all day. Go get some clothes on."

I sat up, clutching the towel. She turned her back while I slipped shakily back into my clothes.

"How did you get in?" I asked hoarsely. "I'm not complaining, you understand," I added quickly.

"Same way your other visitors got in," she said. "You may have had your door locked, but you left another doorway wide open." She pointed to the center of the rug.

There was the circle I had drawn last night, in which Ariel had appeared and disappeared twice, one arc of it scuffed out by someone's foot.

"You're a very careless young man," the little, old lady said, turning around abruptly. I turned my back to her and hastily zipped up my pants. "Carelessness is never profitable," she went on, "but when you get to fooling

around with magic and witchcraft, it becomes downright foolhardy. Well, what have you found out?"

The question caught me flat-footed. I blinked. "Nothing," I said.

"Wasted my money, did I?" She nodded as if she had expected it all along.

"Hold on," I objected. "I've only been on the case a little over twenty-four hours."

"Long enough," she said. She stamped around the room.

I WAS beginning to be annoyed. "I've got a few complaints myself. You threw me into this situation without a word of explanation. You—"

"Would you have believed me if I'd told you?"

"Well, no," I admitted. "But you let me blunder my way around, nearly getting killed two or three times, and—"

"I told you there'd be danger."

"Not this kind of danger." I motioned to the towel.

"You didn't think of that when you were looking at that bill." She chuckled. "Want to give it back?"

I hesitated and made up my mind. "All right—deducting a day's work and expenses." I pulled out my billfold.

She held up a pale, thin hand. "Now, just a minute. I haven't said I wanted it back. You can't quit a job that easy. What have

you found out since yesterday?"

"I told you," I said. "Nothing." I started taking out the remains of the thousand dollars. Luckily, I hadn't used too much of it.

"Didn't find out his name?"

"Solomon," I said. "Solomon Magus." I kept counting.

"Nonsense," she said impatiently. "I mean his real name."

"No." I counted out nine hundred and seventy-six dollars on the bureau top, extracted eleven dollars, to make it twenty-five dollars for the day, plus ten dollars expenses, and shoved the rest toward her.

"No clues?" she asked. "Is that all I get for my money?"

"Well," I asked reluctantly, "I found a return-trip ticket to Washington, D.C."

"Ah," she said significantly.

"But I'm not even sure it belongs to him. There's your money. Take it."

Her faded blue eyes looked me over shrewdly. "You're too eager. Why? Got another client, have you?"

"Maybe," I admitted.

"Who is it?"

"That," I said pointedly, "is none of your business."

"Paying you as well as I am?" she asked quizzically. "Bet not. Bet it's a girl. Paying you in kisses, I bet. You look like the kind of young fool who'd rather have kisses than money."

I flushed. "Maybe you're right," I said.

"Tell me," she said complacently, "does this new job conflict with what I paid you to do?"

"Well . . ." I began hesitating.

"Then," she said triumphantly, "why not do both jobs at once? I guess you're not allergic to money."

I thought about it for a moment and shook my head. I looked aside and was turned to stone. Somehow, the black mirror leaning against the wall had been turned around so it faced into the room. The little old lady should have been reflected in it, but it wasn't the little old lady I saw.

Darkly, glimmering up at me through the mists of night, was the face of Ariel.

SHE turned her head, and I looked into the mirrored eyes of a frightened angel. A dark angel. I looked back and forth between the night-ridden image of youth and beauty and the reality of withered age. Angel? Witch! And I loved the one in the black mirror.

"Ariel?" I groaned. "Why? And which one is you?"

She took a step toward me, her hand half-raised, and just then the door swung open. Uriel walked into the room, calmly and stopped, glancing quickly at us. He grasped the situation almost instantly.

Uriel was only an inch or two taller than the old lady, and his white hair went well with her gray, perky curls. They made a jolly old couple. But where did that leave me? In love with a phantom in dark glass?

A cry broke from the old lady's throat. It was strangely incongruous. "Don't you know?" she said, and it was Ariel's voice.

"How can I?" I groaned. It was getting to be a habit. "Everybody's someone else. Nobody's themselves. How do I know what to believe. Who are you?"

She broke into tears and sank down into a chair. "You don't love me!" she said brokenly.

"Look in the mirror, son!" Uriel said firmly.

I looked. Uriel was mirrored there. Uriel himself, not someone else. "What is that supposed to tell me?" I asked. "That you're not disguised?"

"Exactly," Uriel said. He walked quickly to the mirror, keeping to one side of it so that he could not see his own reflection, and turned it to the wall. "And that means the mirror shows people as they are, not as they aren't." He inspected the letters around the edges. "Interesting," he mused and became engrossed.

I turned to Ariel—and it was Ariel. Mrs. Peabody was gone. Ariel's eyes were wet with tears as she looked up at me.

"How old are you?" I asked sternly, unable to keep my doubts from spilling over.

"Twenty-two," she said, looking miserable.

"Really?"

"Well," she said, "twenty-three."

I sighed. That had the ring of truth. And after my experiences of the last couple of days, it had the added flavor of novelty. "Why?" I asked. "Why did you do it?"

"Think, Gabriel!" she said, and a hint of impatience was creeping into her voice. "I didn't want anyone to know that I was investigating Solomon. And I certainly had no way of knowing I could trust you."

"Not at first, maybe," I said doggedly, "but you had plenty of chances to tell me later."

She blushed. "I was going to tell you, Gabriel. I was going to tell you when I came down here. And then when I knocked and couldn't get an answer, and I had to materialize inside the room and saw you with your face all red—I decided it would be better for Mrs. Peabody to save you. You would never have to know that I had deceived you and Mrs. Peabody could just fade away."

"And you had to make one last test to be sure you could trust me," I added, scowling.

"If I'd known you were going to act like this, Gabriel, I'd never

have bothered," she retorted stubbornly, with supreme illogic.

"For God's sake!" I shouted. "Stop calling me Gabriel! You know my name."

Her eyes grew big with alarm. "Sh-h-h!" she said. "Don't say it!"

I WENT toward her, with some high-class illogic of my own, my arms outstretched. "Then you do care," I sighed.

The next thing I knew, I was sitting in the chair, and she was curled up in my lap, her head on my shoulder, whispering things in my ear, and Uriel was coughing, having spent as much time inspecting the mirror as he could find excuse for.

"Children," he said, "there is work to do. And I must say, Ariel, you're growing very careless about your spells."

"Goodness!" Ariel said, sitting up and looking down at her dress—Mrs. Peabody's dress, that is. "This lavender and lace doesn't do a thing for me, either. You'll have to excuse me for a moment."

She dashed to the circle and disappeared. Uriel and I stared blankly at each other, shaking our heads. Minutes later she was back in a sleek black dress that did a great deal for her, but Uriel and I, under a gentleman's agreement, ignored her appearance and continued our discussion of the books he had noticed on the desk. He

cleared up a number of my vaguer conceptions about the principles of magic.

Ariel sat down on the edge of a chair, looking hopefully back and forth between us, like a little girl trying not to be heard, but seen. At last she gave up. "I'm back," she said.

I turned to her. "Tell me. Who was Gabriel?"

She sighed heavily. I forced back a smile. "He was Father's protégé, a graduate student who was really quite an adept. Uriel thought Gabriel was almost as good as he was himself. We were hoping he could help us with Solomon. And then he was killed in a traffic accident."

"That was no accident," I said, and I told them about La Volsin's slip.

"The murderers!" Ariel said angrily.

"Was he in love with you?" I asked.

Ariel was thoughtful. "Maybe. But I didn't—I mean he was just a nice boy."

"That makes two murders, then. Gabriel and your father."

"If Prospero's death was murder," Uriel said, shaking his head. "I didn't realize anything was wrong until too late—he didn't tell me. Even now, I can't believe that Solomon would stoop to the disgusting nonsense involved in the Mass—the ruined church, the black

host, the water from the well in which an unbaptized infant has been drowned, all the rest."

"He's already made two attempts on Gabri—on *his* life," Ariel said. "The black mirror and an enchanted towel that almost strangled him. The only thing Solomon cares about is power, and the only way he can be sure of that is to kill us off."

"I understand that you haven't been feeling well," I said, turning to Uriel, while I massaged my throat reminiscently.

"Nonsense," Uriel said stoutly. "Never felt better in my life." He started coughing. It had a hollow sound. For the first time, I noticed that Uriel's rosy appearance of health was an illusion. His red cheeks were rouged. Ariel and I exchanged worried glances.

"Let's get to work," Ariel said. "Tell him about the clue, Gabri—"

She stopped and stared at the expression on my face. Something had just occurred to me.

"You might as well call me Casey," I said. "I just remembered. I signed the hotel register with my own name."

VII

THEY stared at me, aghast. I shook my head remorsefully. "I'm afraid I'm a bust at this business. I'll never remember all the rules. I suppose they know

your name," I said to Uriel.

"I'm afraid so. Since Professor Reeves and I founded the society, we had little opportunity for deception. Many early members knew us, and our preliminary researches attracted a little publicity. Anyone could have learned our names, without much more than asking."

"Professor Reeves was Prospero?" I asked. "Ariel's father?"

"Yes," Ariel said.

"And what about you?" I asked, turning to her. "Do they know your name?"

"Yes," she said, "but they don't know it."

"Eh?" I said blankly. "Go through that once more. They know it, but they don't know it?"

She shook her head. "It isn't a good thing to talk about."

"But what is this name business?" I asked. "Does it have to be all your names, or just your first or last name, or what?"

"Your real name," Uriel said. "The name that is you. In most cases, that's your Christian name, although, in many primitive tribes all over the world, the child was given a secret or sacred name, known only to himself or his parents."

"That's me." I chuckled. "I'm not so bad off after all. Casey isn't my real name. And I don't think anyone has used anything else since I was christened."

"Thank God!" Ariel breathed.

I took her hand and squeezed it.

"You said you had a clue?"

Uriel said quickly. Maybe he wanted to forestall another outburst of affection.

I fished out the ticket again. It was getting a little battered. "Maybe—but I don't know what good it can do us."

Uriel looked it over carefully. He balanced it on his fingertips and muttered a few words. The ticket fluttered. "It fits," Uriel said, looking up. "I'm almost sure Solomon held this in his hand at one time. And now that I think about it, it's natural that he should be from Washington."

"Washington?" I echoed foolishly. "Why?"

"That's where the power is," Ariel said thoughtfully. "And he's the most ambitious man I've ever known."

"Washington," I mused. "That narrows it down some, but not much. He could be anyone, from a public figure to a man behind the throne whom nobody knows."

Ariel's face fell.

"But it isn't hopeless," I said. "Hold everything."

I PICKED up the telephone, asked for long distance and then for Jack Duncan at the Associated Press Washington newsroom. I turned to smile at Ariel. She and Uriel were watching me blankly.

"Jack?" I said. "Casey . . . Fine, fine . . . Business. Tell me, who's gone from Washington?"

"Oh, man, you started drinking early this morning," Jack replied sarcastically.

"You know what I mean. Someone important."

"Everybody, my boy. Nobody hangs around here over the weekend but us wage slaves."

I was silent for a moment, thinking just how to phrase the question that had occurred to me. "Answer me this, then. Who's the luckiest man in Washington?"

"Me, boy—I start on my vacation Monday."

"Come on, Jack! Who thinks you're important besides your wife? This is important. Who's the luckiest man in Washington?" I repeated impatiently.

"At cards, love or horses?"

"All of those, but especially in getting where he wants to be. Top of the heap, maybe."

"Well, well." Jack was thinking now. "Tain't the Great White Father. The honeymoon is over and he don't like it so good. The word is going around that he won't be running again. Hell, man! There's only one boy that fits. Never seems to need money. All of his enemies have bad luck, but he comes up smelling like a rose. And in the last year or so, all of his intraparty rivals have died or retired with poor health

or something equally unlikely."

"His name, Jack, his name." I was excited now.

"You know it, boy. Names are dangerous. No telling who might be tapping this line."

"Give me a clue, Jack!" I said eagerly. "I have to be sure."

"America's biggest, bestest, one-man self-help organization. Look in today's headlines, or yesterday's, or tomorrow's. You'll see his name. No doubt about it. The party might not like it, and a lot of Americans might feel like cutting their throats, but he's gonna sweep the convention unless somebody fixes his little red wagon. And probably get elected, too. That's private stock, boy. Don't spread it around."

"Got it," I said exultantly. "He's out of town now, isn't he?"

JACK hesitated. "Wait a second." I could hear him yelling over the teletype clatter to somebody across the room. "Sorry to disillusion you, sonny," he said. "The great man was seen this morning, taking a brisk walk around the block." He sounded disappointed himself. "For a moment I thought you might be able to do the American people their greatest service."

"Thanks, Jack," I said dully. I lowered the phone gently and turned slowly to Ariel and Uriel. I shrugged. "I guess you heard.

It was a thought, anyway."

"Don't get discouraged so easy, son," Uriel said, and his eyes were sparkling. "You've got him."

"Maybe you didn't hear after all," I said in amazement. Then, I snapped my fingers. "That's it. He flew back to shake my possible suspicion."

"Could be," Uriel said, "but I don't think so. Too risky. Somebody might spot him."

"Then what?"

"Casey," Ariel said. "Did you ever hear of a simulacrum?"

"An image?" I asked.

Uriel nodded. "That's the hard way, of course. He could have left somebody in disguise, but there's nobody he can trust with his real identity. He can assign a few minor jobs, but he has to do all the big things himself. That's his weak point. That, and his lust for power."

"And overconfidence," I said, thinking back.

"Maybe," Uriel said.

"Then we've got him!" I said eagerly.

Uriel gave me a reproving glance. "We can't proceed on guesswork. We must have proof. It might be the wrong man."

"What loss?" I shrugged.

"Casey?" Ariel said, frowning.

"What do you want him to do? Come up and present his birth certificate?" I said disgustedly. "For magicians and witches, it

seems to me you two are awfully particular. But don't mind me. I'm just a novice at this thing."

"You don't understand," Ariel said firmly.

"The greater the power, my son," Uriel said, "the greater the responsibility."

"That ain't the way I heard it," I said. "The greater the power, the greater the corruption."

Ariel turned her back on me. I could see from the set of it that I had gone too far.

"I'm sorry," I said. "But, after we've got a lead like this, the first break in the case, you aren't going to make any use of it . . ." I took hold of Ariel's shoulders and tried to turn her around, but she seemed to be made of stone. "Ariel," I said softly, "I'm sorry. I'll go along with whatever you say."

She looked back over her shoulder. "Well-I-I." And she turned around to face us again.

"You're jumping to conclusions again," Uriel said patiently. "We aren't going to throw this away. There are some things we can do without harm. This, for instance."

HE rubbed out the circle I had drawn on the rug and chalked in another. He started inscribing equations around it. After a moment, he hesitated and rubbed his forehead. "My memory isn't as good as it used to be," he apolo-

gized. "I wish I had that book. Must have lost it somewhere."

I bent down and lifted the corner of the rug and pulled out the manuscript. "This?" I said.

"Yes," he said happily. "Dear me, yes. You *are* a help! Where did you find it? Never mind."

He went back to his task, consulting the manuscript occasionally. When he was finished, the rug was almost covered with chalk marks. "There!" he said, getting creakily up off his knees.

I looked at it dubiously.

"It's an old Chaldean spell—an exorcism," he explained. "In cases of this kind, it's helpful to recite the verbal equivalent, too."

He entered the circle and lifted his face toward the ceiling. Little, white-haired, cherubic, he was not my idea of a magician. He looked more like a professor about to expand on some dull minutiae.

He began to chant in a low and surprisingly effective voice, "He who makes the image, he who enchants, the evil face, the evil eye, the evil mouth, the evil tongue, the evil lip, the evil word . . ."

Shivers ran up and down my spine.

"Spirit of the sky, exorcise them! Spirit of the earth, exorcise them!"

"The magician has bewitched us with his magic, he has bewitched us with his magic.

"The witch has bewitched us

with her magic, she has bewitched us with her magic.

"He who has fashioned images corresponding to our whole appearance has bewitched our appearance;

"He has seized the magic draught prepared for us and has soiled our garments, he has torn our garments and has mingled his magic herb with the dust of our feet;

"May the fire-god, the hero, turn their magic to nought!"

I LET out my breath and realized that I had been holding it a long time.

"My goodness," Uriel said. "I feel better already."

He looked better. The pallor beneath the rouge had changed to a healthier pink. I felt better, too. My neck had been sore and stiff. I touched it tentatively. It seemed as good as ever.

"What now?" I asked.

"Now," said Uriel vigorously, "is the time for the counterattack. We must trick him into showing his true face."

Silently, I pointed toward the back of the mirror leaning against the wall.

"Ideal!" Uriel cried. "Now, where would be the best place? I'm afraid the Crystal Room is out."

"How about his rooms?" I suggested. "He won't be expecting

us to come there after him."

"His rooms?" Ariel said, frowning.

"The penthouse," I said.

"The very thing," Uriel said.

"I don't know what we'd do without you, son."

"But will he be there?" Ariel asked anxiously.

"There's one good way to find out," Uriel said. He turned to me. "A program."

I pulled it out of my coat pocket. "It won't do you any good. Only October 30 was listed."

Uriel opened it to the middle. "Oh, no. This is fine."

I looked over his shoulder. The page headed October 30 had changed completely. It now read—

OCTOBER 31

10:00 THE ORIGINS OF
ROODMAS (WALPUR-
GIS NIGHT)

10:30 WHEN THE GOD WAS
KILLED—A PANEL DIS-
CUSSION

11:00 EINSTEIN'S FIELD THE-
ORY — A VINDICATION
OF THE ART

"Oh, dear!" Uriel said. "That was my lecture. I'm afraid there will be a blank in the program."

11:30 THE KABBALISTS—
RIFTER THAN THEY
KNEW

12:00 A SPELL FOR ADONIS
12:30 USEFUL WAX IMAGES
AND HOW TO MAKE
THEM

1:00 Recess

3:00 AN ARGUMENT FOR
AUGURY

3:30 WHY THERE ARE NO
PROFESSIONAL MAGI-
CIANS IN EGYPT

"No magicians?" I said.

"All priests. It was the state religion."

4:00 INVISIBILITY — A LOST
ART

5:00 THE VAMPIRE IN
MYTH AND FACT

"Oh, dear!" Uriel moaned softly. "Darker and darker."

8:00 Banquet

11:00 INVOCATION — PENT-
HOUSE

"I thought the invocation always came at the beginning," I said.

"Not this kind of invocation," Ariel said.

"Oh, me," Uriel said. "Do you suppose . . ."

Ariel shook her head grimly. "I'm afraid so."

"We'll have to stop them," Uriel said with determination.

"What's this all about?" I asked, but they were looking at each other in distress. I shrugged and glanced at my watch. Five minutes after ten. Only five after ten? I shook it, but it was still running. "According to this, then," I said, "he should still be in the Crystal

Room—for several hours yet.”

“But how can we be sure?” Ariel asked.

I picked up the telephone and asked for the Crystal Room. I listened to the phone ring at the other end, and then someone picked it up and said, “Hello,” very softly. Someone was speaking in the background.

“The Magus, please,” I said.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” the voice replied. “He’s on stage now. Can I have him call you when he’s free?”

“Never mind,” I said quickly. “I’ll call back later.” I turned to Ariel and Uriel. Uriel was chalk-ing equations on the back of the mirror. Ariel was looking at me expectantly.

“Let’s go,” I said bravely. “Let’s go beard the magician in his pent-house.”

But my knees were shaking.

URIEL stepped back, inspected his work, and turned to us. “You two will have to go ahead. There are some preparations I must attend to. Take the mirror, and put it somewhere so he won’t see it until too late. Then search his rooms for some clue to his identity. Failing that, try to get some hairs or nail clippings. Even Homer nods. Why not Solomon?”

I pulled the automatic out from under my arm and inspected it again before I replaced it.

Ariel watched me, frowning. “That won’t do you any good.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” I said. “Maybe it won’t do Solomon any damage, but it sure makes *me* feel a lot better.”

I got a towel out of the bathroom, wrapped the mirror in it and turned toward the door. “Ready?”

We took an elevator to the thirty-fifth floor. The hall was empty and dark. I watched the shadows suspiciously, ready to jump—for the stairs—if anything moved. I wasn’t cut out for this kind of work.

I put my hand on the doorknob and tried to turn it. The door was locked. I looked at Ariel inquiringly.

She muttered something under her breath and reached out with one finger to touch the knob. Nothing happened. She frowned and bit her lip.

“There’s a spell on it,” she said.

I racked my memory for the section of Uriel’s manuscript called Counter-Spells. I reached in my pocket for the piece of chalk that had become standard equipment, drew a circle around the knob and an X across the keyhole in the knob, then hesitantly jotted down an equation. As I finished writing the last figure, the door swung gently open.

I turned to smile proudly at Ariel. She smiled back and said,

"You continue to surprise—"

She stopped, and her eyes got big. There was fear mirrored in them. They looked over my shoulder. I spun around and stopped petrified.

In the doorway, facing us, green eyes glinting, tail lashing wickedly back and forth, was a tiger.

And, as I identified it, I knew it wasn't a tiger at all. There never was a tiger with black face, ears and paws, and fur the color of cream. It was a Siamese cat, but it was big as a tiger, and its eyes studied us hungrily as it crouched a little closer to the floor.

"A familiar!" Ariel breathed.

THE paralysis left me. I made the fastest draw of my life. The .38 was pointed and my finger was squeezing the trigger when Ariel put her hand past my arm, her finger aimed at the cat, and muttered a few words. Suddenly, I was aiming two feet over the cat's head. It had shrunk to normal size. I eased my finger off the trigger and put the gun away, feeling foolish.

Ariel moved past me and bent down to pet the cat, but it stared at her haughtily, sniffed at me and moved aloofly away on business of its own. I was just as happy to see it go. I let out a sigh and discovered that I was still hugging the mirror under one arm.

"I don't think I'm ever going

to get used to this," I said. "Let's get it over with."

Ariel nodded quickly, uneasily, and started across the lush living room toward two doors then opened off it. I looked around for a place to spot the mirror. Finally, I got an idea. The windows were fitted with venetian blinds, but one of them was partly raised. I unwrapped the mirror carefully and propped it in the window frame. The bottom of the blind kept it from falling out. I stepped back and admired it—for an angle. If the man who called himself Solomon didn't return until night—and there was a good chance that he wouldn't—he would never suspect that one window was a mirror, until too late.

I hoped he would get trapped in it as I had.

Ariel came out of one room, empty-handed. I pointed out the mirror, so that she would know where it was. She nodded.

"Find anything?" I whispered. There wasn't any reason to whisper, but that was the way I felt.

She shook her head. "No papers—nothing," she whispered back. "I've never seen a place so clean."

She vanished into the other room. I poked around the living room, lifting cushions, peering under furniture, searching desk drawers. There wasn't even any dust or lint. Ariel came back.

"The rooms are spotless," she

whispered. "Even the sheets have been changed."

"It's impossible," I said. "Nobody could live here, even for a few hours, without leaving some trace. I'd think we were in the wrong rooms, if it weren't for that cat. Come to think about it, where is the cat?"

Ariel shook her head. "I haven't seen it."

My nerves were beginning to quiver. I was ready to admit defeat and try something else, but there was one more door. We walked toward it together.

"Those were bedrooms?" I asked.

She nodded. "And a bath."

"No personal things?" I said. "No razor? No toothbrush?"

"Just unused glasses and towels and unwrapped soap."

We went through the door and into a kitchen. It was all enamel and glass and stainless steel. Everything glistened and gleamed. There weren't even any dirty glasses. The place was fantastically, implausibly clean.

I snooped through the cabinets and drawers without much hope. Dishes were stacked neatly, glasses were turned top down, silverware was perfectly aligned.

"Where's that damned cat?" I muttered.

It wasn't in the kitchen, either. There was nothing in the kitchen that didn't belong there except

Ariel and me. We were stamped.

The cat meowed loudly from the living room. We stiffened and turned toward the door. I pushed it open. The cat was sitting in front of the hall door, looking up at it expectantly. I held Ariel back, feeling suddenly chilled.

There was a noise from the hall, distant and uncertain, like doors sliding. The cat looked at us and back at the door, and I looked at the cat, and Ariel peered over my shoulder.

We all heard it then—a key slipping into the doorknob and turning.

VIII

"**M**EOW-WT" the cat said. "*R-reow!*" It was a warning.

The door swung open. I pressed Ariel back into the kitchen and let the door close to a slit. I pulled the .38 out of the shoulder holster and held it ready in my hand. Maybe it was useless, but it felt good there.

Solomon stepped into the room, cautiously, looking at both sides of the door and at the floor. The cat jumped at him, clawing his black pants, and chattering angrily about strangers who had broken into the penthouse in a voice that was almost understandable.

Solomon ignored it. His head, slowly turning, swept his gaze around the room. He half-turned,

his left arm straightening out suddenly in a savage arc that sent something in his hand hurtling away. Involuntarily, my eyes followed it. Glass tinkled. A square of night shivered itself into black fragments.

But just before the black mirror broke, shattered by the heavy key, I saw Solomon as he really was. That momentary glimpse was enough. I knew him. There could be no mistake. I only hoped the information hadn't come too late.

I looked back toward Solomon. He was gone. My heart missed a beat. It started again, strongly, hopefully. Had he been trapped in the mirror before it broke? Had the key he threw shattered Solomon himself into a million shards? For a moment, I let myself believe it.

In back of me, Ariel shattered my illusion. She gasped. I swung around, my gun ready.

We faced Solomon. He leaned, dark-faced and smiling, against the stainless-steel sink. The cat rubbed against his dark leg, her eyes fixed on us malevolently.

"So," he said urbane, "the beautiful witch and the intrepid detective." Cream-colored fur lifted on the cat's back—she growled deep in her throat. "Baah!" Solomon said. "You mustn't be inhospitable to our guests, even if they did get here a little early." He looked back at us.

"So nice of you to come to see me. You saved me endless trouble in searching you out. I did want to invite you to my little party this evening. Especially you, my dear—" and he bowed mockingly to Ariel. "There is a special place in the ceremony for a virgin, and virgins are so hard to find these days."

"Don't move!" I said, shoving the automatic toward him, my finger tightening on the trigger. "Don't lift a hand! I won't have any remorse about shooting you."

He frowned. "I don't think you would. That isn't very friendly of you." His face cleared. "But you must realize that, if Ariel's spells are useless, that thing you're holding is a mere toy." He looked at Ariel. "You can stop muttering now. Nothing will work here. I put in too many hours of preparation." He smiled broadly.

Anger was a red tide rising in my throat. My finger got white. The hammer clicked futilely against the cartridge. It clicked again and again. I stared down at the automatic in dazed disbelief.

"There, now," Solomon said gently. "You can relax. In fact, you can't move at all."

It was true. As I looked up, I froze, unable even to twitch an eyelash. Only my chest expanded shallowly, automatically, to draw in air, and my eyes could move from side to side. I looked at

Ariel. She was rigid, too.

"Now," he said, "I'll have to put you both away until tonight. I must get back to the meeting—" he turned to me—"but thank you for calling and letting me know you were on your way up."

I cursed my eternal stupidity. When would I learn? Now, it was too late to learn.

Night came like blindness. I had a moment to wonder if it was permanent before the light came back. I was in a bedroom. Ariel was nowhere in sight. She could have been behind me. I would never have known, since I could not move my head, but I had a feeling she wasn't in the room.

The room was large and well furnished. I remembered that the penthouse had two of them.

Somewhere, a door opened and closed. I could still hear. But after that there was silence.

I stood it as long as I could. It wasn't very long. I struggled against the invisible bonds that held me so tightly, but it was useless. I sagged, worn out.

Ariel, Ariel! I moaned silently. *Where are you?*

Here. It was a cool, quiet voice inside my head. And it was Ariel.

Telepathy! Have you always had it?

Not until just now, when you called.

Where are you? I'm in a bedroom.

In the other bedroom.

Are you all right? He didn't hurt you?

Oh, no.

Can he hear us?

No. He's gone.

The calmness of her voice surprised me. She wasn't frightened any more. The worst had happened, and now she wasn't afraid. I was the one who was scared.

Can you do anything, Ariel?

No. I've been trying.

We're trapped then?

Yes, Casey.

Uriel can help us!

Yes, Casey darling.

But Solomon will be watching for him.

Uriel knows it. In spite of his appearance, he's very clever.

Ariel,

Yes, darling?

What's your real name? I want to know. You said that Solomon knew it, but he didn't know that he knew.

It's Ariel. Father said they'd never suspect the completely obvious. They'd keep looking for something hidden.

My name's Kirk. Kirk Cullen. K. C. Casey. I love you, Ariel.

I love you, Casey. The sweetness of it poured through me like wine. I longed to take her in my arms and hold her there forever, but I could only stand stiffly like a statue—a statue of ice with a melting heart.

Ariel, we've got to get out of here.

Yes! Darling.

Uriel. Uriel will rescue us.

We stood there, sharing our thoughts, and watched the shadows creep across the floor. And finally we heard a door open.

Uriel! It was an explosion of relief, and I thought I heard Ariel echo, Uriel!

And then we heard the bland voice we hated.

"Put him down here," Solomon said.

Our hopes plummeted together. The door closed.

"Still silent, old man?" Solomon said. "Well, we'll put you away for now, and put you away for good a little later. You've caused me more trouble than all the rest put together."

A MOMENT later, out of the corner of my eye, I saw something flicker into being. It was Uriel, small and pale and stiff. The door opened and closed again. Uriel didn't stir. Even his eyes were motionless.

Is he there with you, Casey?

Yes, I answered hopelessly.

I can't reach him, Ariel said. What has Solomon done to him?

What did Solomon mean, Ariel, when he was talking about virgins?

I don't know.

But she knew. She didn't want to tell me, and I knew now that I

didn't want to know. Not then.

We stood and watched the shadows creep across the floor and waited for the night . . .

The darkness was almost complete. Clouds must have covered the sky as the night came, because not even starlight entered the room. I could just barely make out the faint glimmer of Uriel's face.

We had been listening to voices in the living room for some time now. We had heard furniture being moved around. But the bedroom doors were closed, and we couldn't see what was happening.

A brilliant stroke of lightning lit up the room for a moment with awful clarity. I saw Uriel standing as stiffly as before. He hadn't moved. He might be dead. The thunder rolled. If I could have moved, I would have shuddered.

Ariel! What's going to happen?

Something bad—something evil! Solomon's been building up to it for a long time, with the covenants and the black magic. And now it's November-eve. We should have suspected why he picked this date.

Why? Why November-eve?

It's All-Hallows E'en. Oh, Casey! The door is opening. They're coming for me.

A scream rang through my mind, and I struggled desperately against the terrible paralysis. But uselessly. I couldn't stir a finger. I

listened helplessly to Ariel's broken thoughts, transmitting to me a scene of horror made vivid.

The living room was changed. Ariel scarcely recognized it as two men carried her into the dark room, lit only by tall tapers and the intermittent flickering of lightning. The penthouse was a new Brocken, a modern, exceedingly high mountain, from which to see the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them.

They carried her through the room toward a black altar at the other end, where Solomon waited. There were others in the room. Their dark faces slipped past Ariel on either side. She recognized only one, the magnificent Catherine La Voisin, who smiled at Ariel and winked.

Ariel's overwrought senses felt other things in the room. She could not see them, but they crowded around. They pressed in close.

ON a tripod, in front of the altar, was a copper dish. In it, charcoal burned fitfully. Solomon stood behind the altar. He was dressed in a long white tunic.

The men ripped off Ariel's clothes. They placed her face up on the altar.

Casey! she moaned. Her voice was terror.

The room was silent, except for the thunder that came at intervals

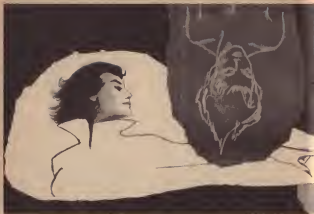
like a roll of giant drums. Solomon began to speak in a low voice. Ariel could not make out the words at first and then his voice grew louder.

" . . . gathered here in the required numbers, we summon Thee, Prince, Ruler of Darkness, Lord of Evil. Your worshippers summon Thee to receive our sacrifice. We summon Thee by our allegiance. We summon Thee by the great Names of the God of gods and Lord of lords. ADONAY, TETRAGRAMMATON, JEHOVA, TETRAGRAMMATON, ADONAY, JEHOVA, OTHEOS, ATHANATOS, ISCHYROS, AGLA, PENTAGRAMMATON, SADAY, SADAY, SADAY, JEHOVA, OTHEOS, ATHANATOS, a Liciat TETRAGRAMMATON, ADONAY, ISCHYROS, ANTHANATOS, SADY, SADY, SADY, CADOS, CADOS, CADOS, ELOY, AGLA, AGLA, ADONAY, ADONAY . . . "

Casey! He's got a sword! And there's something coming. I can feel it. It's getting closer!

Her silent screams echoed and re-echoed through my mind. I made one last convulsive effort that broke my unseen bonds like rotten ropes and sent me hurtling to the door. I tore it open.

Far across the room, was the altar, with Ariel's white body outlined against its blackness. Behind her, was Solomon, white-



robed, his face lit redly by the fire in front of the altar. But the face glowed from within, with a darker light. Behind him, cast like a shadow against the wall, was a towering shape of darkness that appeared to draw in upon him as I watched. His hands lifted the sword high . . .

"Stop!"

The shout froze the room into a fantastic tableau. But it hadn't been my shout.

Someone else was moving in the room. Someone came close to

the altar, into the flickering light. It was Catherine La Voisin, her hair gleaming brighter than the fire. And then it was no longer the red-haired witch. Uriel stood where she had been. Small, old, shabby, he defied the room.

"Begone, shadows!" he said, pointing one long finger toward Solomon and the altar. A spear of light shot out from his finger. "Flee, shadows—as you must always flee before the light!" His body seemed to glow in the darkness. "Twisted projections of a



twisted mind, vanish into the nothingness whence you came!"

He rattled off a series of equations, filled with functions and derivatives, faster than I could follow. I felt a fresh clean hlow through the room, sweeping cobwebs away before it. Ariel stirred.

The shadow behind Solomon had shrunk when Uriel's finger of light struck it. Now it dwindled farther. It crouched behind Solomon.

"Go!" Uriel commanded sternly.

Solomon woke from a daze. "Night conquers the day," he thundered. "Darkness conquers the light. Power makes all men bow before it. Bow, then!"

THE sword over Ariel trembled in Solomon's hand, as he fought to bring it down. His Satanic face and white robe towered over Uriel's white-haired shabby insignificance. They battled for the sword, the two of them, straining against invisible forces.

Slowly the sword started down. "Senator!" I shouted.

Solomon looked up. He peered across the room at me, his face contorted and headed with sweat.

"This time the gun will not fail, Senator!" I yelled. "The bullets are silver, and your name is written on them!"

I pulled the trigger of the gun that had rested in my hand for over twelve hours. My hand recoiled again and again. I saw his robe twitch. He staggered. The sword dropped in his hands. And then it lifted again.

The hammer clicked empty.

"Lights!" Uriel shouted. "Let the light chase away the darkness!"

Blindly, the lights came on. The young man who had been the doorkeeper of the Crystal Room was blinking dazedly beside the switch. The others in the room seemed just as dazed.

Uriel's finger was outstretched

toward Solomon, his lips moving rapidly. Energy flashed through the room, brilliantly, electrically. Thunder crashed.

The lightning seemed to pour down the blade of the uplifted sword. The sword fell. There were no bands to hold it. The white robe crumpled emptily to the floor. There was no one inside them.

Solomon was gone . . .

I heard the door open and the sound of running feet, but I didn't look to see what was happening. I was racing toward the altar. I gathered Ariel into my arms and kissed her and held her tight. She was crying shakily, but, in a moment, her arms went around me. She stopped shaking.

"Casey!" she said softly. "I knew you would save me."

"It wasn't me," I said. "It was Uriel."

I half-turned. Uriel was standing beside us, smiling mildly, looking pleased. Otherwise the room was empty. The others had fled.

"It was mainly trickery," he said, grinning sheepishly. "To confuse Solomon." He opened his hand. There was a pencil flashlight in it. "That was the beam of light. I used a phosphorescent dye on the clothes and, by hypnosis, induced the young man by the light switch to smuggle in an ultraviolet projector. The most difficult job was immobilizing La Voisin." He shuddered. "A violent woman."

"What about Solomon?" Ariel asked, shivering, as she turned to the crumpled white robe.

"Oh, he's gone," Uriel said cheerfully. "Where, I haven't the slightest idea. But he won't be back. I hated to do it, but he insisted on forcing his warped ideas onto formless energy. Now that he's gone, his simulacrum in Washington will die in a few days. A very neat ending for public consumption, although something of a puzzle to the doctors, I'm afraid." He looked at me approvingly. "Those bullets were very helpful. They distracted him at a crucial moment."

"They didn't seem to do much damage," I said puzzledly. "Of course, they weren't silver, and they didn't have his name on them."

"Wouldn't have helped if they had," Uriel said. "In those clothes, I think you'll find what was called in my day a bulletproof vest. He always liked to play both sides."

"You gave us a scare, though," Ariel said. "We thought you were captured."

I TURNED quickly and raced to the bedroom door. "My God, yes!" Uriel was still standing there in the darkness. I looked back and forth between the two. "But what . . . ?"

"Solomon wasn't the only one who could manufacture simulacra.

I let him take this one, and he didn't even wonder why it was so easy. He had a bad habit of underestimating his opposition. But I'd better get rid of this."

He muttered something under his breath. The image disappeared.

I sighed. "Now we can forget the whole thing."

"Forget?" Uriel exclaimed. "Dear me, no! The Art is still valid. It must be given to the world."

"But—but," I spluttered, "that would be like telling them how to make atom bombs in their basements!"

"Knowledge can never be suppressed, young man," Uriel said sternly. "Common understanding is the finest safeguard. Of course, there are some finishing touches that are necessary. Oh, dear me, yes. I must be going. There is so much to be done."

He nodded happily at us and trotted out of the room.

I turned to Ariel in bewilderment. She had slipped back into her torn clothing. She fumbled behind her back, looking at me over her shoulder.

"Don't worry, Casey," she said.

"He'll be putting finishing touches on his theory for years. Fasten this, will you?"

I fastened it, and it seemed very commonplace and marital, but it sent shivers running up and down my arms, and this time it wasn't terror.

"I wonder what my life will be like," I said, bending down to kiss the soft hollow between her throat and her shoulder, "when I'm married to a witch."

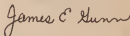
She took a deep breath and leaned her head against mine. "It's a good thing you said that. Because you haven't any choice. From now on you're going to be a faithful, submissive husband."

"Why?" I asked uneasily.

"Because," she said, twisting around to press herself against me, "I know your real name."

I sighed and resigned myself to my fate. After all, every man marries a witch, whether he knows it or not.

And one kind of witchcraft is pretty much like another.



This is a formal invitation to attend the informal Fifth Indian Lake Conference to be held on May 22 and 23, 1954, at the Hotel Ingals, Bellefontaine, Ohio. You'll meet your favorite writers, artists and editors there.

THE AFTERLIFE OF REILLY

By
RICHARD DEMING

*Bottoms up and here's looking
at you . . . down the hatch!*



Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS



DINTY Reilly planted both hands on the bar and raised himself to his full five feet six. He felt belligerent.

"You're merely picking scapegoats to cover your own shortcomings,

Mr. Clanahan. The statesmen and diplomats at the United Nations aren't responsible for the mess we're in. Place the blame where it belongs. On the people who talk war. On yourself!"

The bartender's face was beginning to grow red. "If you can't conduct a gentlemanly argument without talking nonsense, Mr. Reilly, you've had enough. Off with you!"

"Nonsense is it, Mr. Clanahan? And how many times have I stood at this same bar and heard you flap your tonsils about using the A-bomb on Russia or China or some other nation we happened to disagree with?"

Clanahan scowled at him. "So what? Who listened to me, beyond a dozen barflies like yourself?"

Dinty's thin face grew white with anger. "Barfly, am I?" He drew a deep breath. "Now who is introducing personalities into a gentlemanly discussion, Mr. Clanahan?"

"What I mean is, how could what I say have any effect on the international situation?" the bartender explained in partial apology.

DINTY emitted a mild snort. "Just multiply your own fool self by millions of warlike Americans as belligerent as yourself and by millions of Russians and Chinese sounding off in exactly the same way. You help set a national mood. A world mood! Don't blame the diplomats, Mr. Clanahan. They're only fingers on the pulse of public opinion."

Clanahan said, "I've heard you

advise the use of the A-bomb yourself!"

"Hah! You'd try to change the subject because you're in a corner!"

"It's the same subject."

"The same subject indeed! You're arguing with words, Mr. Clanahan."

"And what else is there to argue with, Mr. Reilly?"

Dinty waved one hand impatiently. "I'll argue no more with a man as ignorant as yourself. I'll have a boilermaker."

"You've had enough."

Dinty glared at him in outrage. "Come here, Mr. Clanahan," he said, moving like a slightly wobbly bantam rooster to the plate glass window constituting the front wall of the tavern. "I want to show you something."

The big barkeep lumbered from behind the bar and stood waiting suspiciously with meaty hands on his hips.

"See yon tall building?" Dinty asked, pointing diagonally across the street.

Clanahan nodded. "The City Hospital."

"And you see its roof four stories up?"

The bartender nodded again.

"Now, Mr. Clanahan, I'll have a boilermaker, or I'll knock you clear on top of that roof, so help me."

He began to wind up his thin

right arm like a baseball pitcher preparing for a curve. Clanahan calmly removed one fist from his hip and belted the little man on the jaw.

WHEN Dinty recovered awareness of his surroundings, he found himself seated on a ledge with his feet dangling four stories over the street. Peculiarly he felt no dizziness — only amazement when he glanced down and oriented himself.

He was seated on the very roof to which he had threatened to knock Clanahan.

He grew conscious of someone seated at his side, and turned to behold a small blonde girl attired in a neat light-blue suit somewhat like that of an airline hostess. She had a trim figure, laughing blue eyes and a pert nose with a speckling of tiny freckles across the bridge. Shapely, silk-encased legs dangled over the roof edge as unconcernedly as his own.

"That Clanahan has a mighty right hand," Dinty remarked, feeling of his jaw and discovering with some pleasure that it did not pain. "Imagine knocking a man this distance."

The girl laughed. "Clanahan knocked you only a few feet, Dinty. Your head struck an iron table leg and you're dead for the next few minutes."

Dinty absorbed this information

with mild dismay but immediate belief, the latter being somewhat oddly based on his sudden realization that he was dead sober. Nothing less than death could have sobered him so quickly after twelve boilermakers, he reasoned.

"You're an angel then, miss?" he asked.

"Something like," she admitted.

"I'm your guide. Call me Alice."

"Alice," Dinty repeated, liking the name. "Now, what do you mean, I'm dead for the next few minutes? When a man's dead, he's dead for good!"

"Not always, Dinty. You had only a mild concussion, but after they got you to the hospital, your heart suddenly stopped. Right now a doctor is preparing to stick a needle into your heart and administer adrenalin. You'll be alive again in about four minutes, and go on to see your case written up in medical journals for years to come."

"You mean—doctors can actually bring back the dead?" Dinty asked in amazement.

"Oh, yes. It's been done a number of times. However, this is the longest case on record. You've already been dead five minutes. By the time your heart starts beating again, it will be nine. You're the first soul which has actually had time to leave the body before revival."

"Hadden't I better get started

back, then?" Dinty suggested fearfully. "If I'm not there when—"

Alice smiled at him. "You have plenty of time. Things move much faster here. Four minutes of Earth time will seem to you like all day. Look below and see for yourself."

OBEDIENTLY Dinty glanced down and noticed something of which he had been vaguely conscious before, but which bewilderment had shoved to the back of his mind. The street below was crowded with both traffic and pedestrians, but it was motionless. A man stepping from the curb had one foot raised in the air. Another, leaping from a bus to the sidewalk, was actually suspended a few inches from the ground. As Dinty watched, he could detect barely perceptible motion throughout the whole scene, like the motion of a clock's minute hand.

"Why is that?" he asked, fascinated.

"You're on a different plane now, Dinty."

"Oh." He thought that over without growing any wiser, and finally shrugged. "Looks like a long time before I have to get back to my body. What do we do meantime?"

"Anything you like," Alice said. "I'll guide you around, or we can just sit here and talk. Generally they're eager to know what it's like on this side, but you're the first

one I've ever had who isn't going to stay, so maybe you'd rather not know."

Dinty considered this doubtfully. "You mean after I came alive again, it might upset me to know what was in store for me?"

"In a way. You might like it so much you'd be dissatisfied with life, and merely live to die, so to speak."

"H'm. With the shape the world is in, I'm dissatisfied already. I can imagine how much better the afterlife is *without* knowing the details."

Alice smiled and shook her head. "Oh, no. You couldn't possibly imagine what it's like."

"Well," Dinty said cautiously. "Could you tell me a bit—in a general way?"

"Certainly. I'll even show you, if you like."

"Not yet," Dinty said hastily. "Just give me a brief idea of the situation first."

"It would be easier to show," the girl said. "There's more than one kind of afterlife, you know."

"Oh. Heaven and Hell, you mean? H'm. Would it be telling to let me know which I'm destined for?"

"I'm afraid it would, Dinty. Even if I told you, the way you live the rest of your life might change your present destination. What is it you'd like to know about the afterlife?"

DINTY hesitated. "I haven't been an overly religious man," he said finally, "but many's the time I've tried to imagine what it's like over here. And the thought I've always come to is that, in the afterlife, you would find all the things men forever and ever strive for on Earth without being able to reach. Not individual things, like fame and power and so on, but the ideals men want for all mankind."

Alice looked puzzled. "What kind of ideals, Dinty?"

"Things like equality. True equality, where no one is above anyone else. And peace. Real peace. Not an armed truce between nations, but a state where there can't be any conflict, because men have lost the desire to fight each other."

Alice's expression cleared. "Oh, there's that on this side, all right, Dinty. I can show you all Man's ideals actually functioning, just as he hopes to make them function on Earth."

"You can?" Dinty asked, pleased. "If it's like that, I wouldn't be afraid to see it."

"There is one condition you must agree to first, though," Alice said. "A soul can enter Heaven or Hell only at the time ordained for him at birth. We will have to skip forward through Time to the day you are scheduled to arrive permanently."

"I'll agree to that," Dinty said. "Providing you're able to skip us back again."

"That isn't the condition I meant, Dinty—I was just leading up to it. Where we're going, you may see people you know right now on Earth. You must agree never to disclose their eventual fate to them when you return to live, or I can't take you."

"That's fair enough," Dinty said. "I'll abide by that."

"Then hold tight. Here we go."

Alice took his hand, pulled him erect and casually stepped off the roof of the building.

DINTY had the momentary sensation of riding in an elevator, then suddenly he was standing on the sidewalk still holding Alice by the hand.

But the sidewalk was not the familiar one Dinty had so many times trod past the City Hospital on his way to Clanaban's tavern. In the first place, it was too clean. Not that the old sidewalk had been particularly dirty, but this one was antiseptically clean. It also contained not a single ragged crack, as do even the best of Earthly sidewalks. In all respects it was so perfect that it might be described as a concrete worker's ideal of finished workmanship.

Glancing about, Dinty saw that the asphalt street was as flawless as the walk edging it. The hospi-

tal across the way had disappeared, and in its place stood a huge movie theater which billed "The Romance: A Tender Love Story." Down the street, on either side as far as he could see, the bright advertising signs of other places of amusement glittered: taverns, nightclubs, theaters, pool rooms, bowling alleys, gymnasiums, shooting galleries, penny arcades . . . every conceivable type of indoor recreation that could be imagined by anyone.

Idly strolling along the street were numerous persons, some alone, some arm-in-arm couples. All, both male and female, were dressed in comfortable blouses and shorts which suited the warm but invigorating atmosphere, and which varied from each other only in their bright colors. Those who passed eyed Dinty's Earthly clothing with a kind of friendly curiosity and spoke pleasantly to him and his guide—but no one asked questions, merely accepting his presence with what would have seemed indifference, had it not been so gracious. Every face Dinty saw was relaxed in placid lines, and a deep sense of peace radiated over everything.

"What would you like to do first?" Alice asked.

"Have a drink," Dinty said promptly. Then he added rather abashedly, "If they have such things here, that is."

Alice laughed. "Only about every third establishment."

SHE drew him along a few yards and steered him into the first tavern they saw. It was a small place, identically the size of Clanahan's, and arranged in exactly the same manner. But here the bar was unscarred and glistened from constant polish, the walls and floor were spotless instead of stained from numberless spilled beers and poor tobacco-juice marksmanship, and there were no nodding stew-bums seated at the tables beyond the bar. Instead a few men and women immaculately dressed in the usual open-necked blouses and shorts sipped drinks and chatted.

Even the bartender so closely resembled Clanahan that Dinty was startled, and when a white-coated waiter exactly the size and shape of Clanahan's huge bouncer, Amuel, approached the bar from the direction of the tables, Dinty's jaw dropped open. A closer look at both reassured him somewhat, however. The bartender's face was rosy instead of red, his expression cheerful instead of scowling, and his apron was snowy white instead of splotted with everything from absinthe to zombi. And the waiter, though as heavy-shouldered and heavy-featured as Amuel, possessed neither Amuel's ring-dazed expression nor any of his facial bumps and scars. The familiar ap-

pearance of the place was pure coincidence, Dinty decided.

"What will it be, folks?" the bartender asked pleasantly, eyeing Dinty with the friendly curiosity the latter was beginning to expect.

For an instant Dinty imagined he detected a glint of halfrecognition in the bartender's eyes, but if it was there at all, it disappeared immediately. Possibly the man had started to mistake him for someone else, just as he had almost mistaken the bartender for Clanahan, Dinty thought.

"Got bourbon?" Dinty asked.

The bartender chuckled. "No Earthly drinks, brother. I see you're new here. We have nectar in all flavors."

"Nectar?" Dinty said doubtfully, then added, "I'm just a visitor."

"When you taste it, you'll wonder how you ever got down anything as foul-tasting as beer or whisky. You drank them for effect, of course, and if you'd been forced to suffer the taste without benefit of the anesthetic effect, you'd never have touched the stuff."

Dinty still felt doubtful. "This nectar has the same effect, does it?"

This time the bartender laughed aloud. "Here you don't need effect. Could anything make you feel better than you do now?"

Thinking about it, Dinty realized his sense of well-being was so complete that his request for

a drink had been automatic rather than the result of any desire.

THE bartender said, "Here you are forever in a pleasant glow, but with all your wits about you. Once you're on this side, alcohol can't effect you. Even if we had whisky, you couldn't get any drunker on a gallon than you are now. Here you can drink in fellowship, all you want, with no danger of ending in a brawl and waking in the morning with a head the size of a watermelon."

He lifted a bottle from the back bar. "If you've never tasted nectar, I recommend strawberry as a start."

He poured two small glasses and both Dinty and Alice sipped at them. Dinty's eyes widened at the indescribably delicious flavor.

After a moment he said, "My name is Reilly, Mr. Bartender. And who might you be?"

"Clanahan, Mr. Reilly. Just call me Clanahan."

Dinty started in amazement. "Clanahan! The same Clanahan who has . . . had Clanahan's Tavern at Third and Carson?"

The bartender looked pleased. "The same, Mr. Reilly. You were a customer of mine? I thought when you came in there was something familiar about your face, but it's been ten years since I left Earth and my memory was never the best."

The man's words left Dinty flabbergasted. When he finally found his voice, he said in an amazed whisper, "You've forgotten me, Mr. Clanahan? After the terrible arguments we used to have?"

Clanahan's brows puckered in a thoughtful frown. "The only Reilly I recall is a certain Dinty Reilly who made my life miserable by arguing politics in my bar. But I've forgotten what he looked like . . . would you be him?"

"Hah, Mr. Clanahan!" Dinty said. "The same! Though it's a gross libel that I made your life miserable. A mean, argumentative sort of fellow you were yourself. Nothing like the pleasant man you seem now."

"Why, thank you!" Setting clean glasses on the bar, Clanahan poured from another bottle. "I suppose I was unpleasant at times . . . but then I had problems, of course, and now I have none. Try some cherry."

SIPPING, Dinty found it as delicious as the first, but in an entirely different way.

"Tell me about this place, Mr. Clanahan," he said after a moment. "How does an . . . ah . . . soul pass his time here?"

Clanahan shrugged. "Much as he pleases. Those who like work, work. No more nor less than they

want. Those who like play, play. And those who like loafing, loaf."

"And if you like the latter two," Dinty said, dismissing the first alternative, "how does one go about it?"

"Simply go about it. Everything's free here, of course. You have only to exert the energy to look about and find what you want. The varieties of entertainment are endless."

Dinty cast a sidelong glance at Alice. "Even women?"

Clanahan smiled. "In a way. Not quite the way it is on Earth. Here there is love and marriage, but no lust. I don't mean there's no sex, but only no sex without real love. Once you're here, your Earthly ties are ended, so if you meet a woman you can love, the two of you talk it over, and if you suit each other, you marry. Later, if you tire of each other, you break the relationship by mutual consent, and both are free to choose another companion, if you wish."

Dinty frowned slightly. "I'd always been led to believe that marriages in the afterlife were eternal."

"Some are," Clanahan admitted. "At least some here have gone on for thousands of years. But even here it's possible to make minor mistakes and they have to be rectified. We couldn't tolerate anyone being unhappy."

Dinty brooded over this for a moment. "You said that if I meet

a woman I can love, we talk it over. Just how do you mean, Mr. Clanahan?"

"Just what I said. We don't practice 'courtship' as you do on Earth, because basically courtship is nothing more nor less than competing with rivals for the woman you want. Here there are no rivals. You have the pick of so many women, you see, there's no need to pick one some other man wants. If the first woman you ask is taken, or you don't quite appeal to her, she tells you in a friendly manner and you look for another. Then, too, if you particularly want her, you can always try again a few hundred years later. You have all eternity, you know."

"All eternity!" Dinty repeated thoughtfully, trying to visualize it. "It still doesn't sound like the way priests and ministers tell us love is in the afterlife. It seems so . . . well . . . unromantic and matter-of-fact."

"Men don't always take into consideration all the factors when they build their dreams," Alice said gently. "Eternal love is a fine ideal, but suppose two men love the same woman? Must one be sentenced to eternity without her?"

"This way," Clanahan amplified, "there's no such thing as unrequited love or broken hearts. Everyone remains happily in love with *someone* who also loves him.

It's rather like the happier marriages on Earth, except here anyone can have one. There is no conflict involved with love here."

"CONFLICT," Dinty said slowly. "Funny you should use that particular word in connection with love. On Earth it applies mainly to war, and it's one of the things man has striven to eliminate all through history."

"We *have* eliminated it," Clanahan assured him. "It is absolutely impossible to be unhappy here. Naturally we have no war, because war is only a symptom, not a disease itself. The disease that causes war is covetousness. On Earth there will be no peace until men stop desiring the possessions of their neighbors, for not until then will nations stop desiring the possessions of neighbor nations. Our society in the afterlife is based on true brotherly love. Everyone can have everything he wants, with one exception, therefore no one wants what his neighbor possesses."

"What's the exception?" Dinty asked.

Clanahan grinned. "He can't have a fight."

Dinty mused over this. "There are things other than material possessions that men on Earth are willing to fight for. Wars have been fought for power, prestige, for national honor, and sometimes

even to spread religion or philosophy."

"True," Clanahan agreed. "But here power and prestige would be useless, for we are all equal. If you attempted to set yourself up as a ruler, no one would pay any attention to you. And you couldn't enforce rule by threatening to kill people, because we are all immortal. As for national honor, there is no other nation to compare ourself with. And as for religion, we all know the *true* answer, so there is no difference of opinion." He shrugged. "What is there to fight over?"

Dinty contemplated this dubiously. "Suppose I just decided to kick up a row for the hell of it?" he said.

"You wouldn't," Clanahan assured him. "If you were in the slightest degree selfish or capable of hurting a fellow man, you wouldn't be here. We literally practice what men on Earth only preach. There is no conflict of any sort in our existence."

Dinty finished his second nectar and rose from his stool. "You serve an excellent drink, Mr. Clanahan, but I'll be spending my whole time in here and not seeing the rest of this place if I don't move along. Thanks a lot for the drinks."

"You're welcome," Clanahan said, smiling. "Drop back again before you leave."

AS Dinty and Alice left the tavern, Dinty gazed about undecidedly. "There's so much to look at, a man doesn't know where to start."

"Would you like a movie?" Alice asked.

"We got time?"

"Oh, yes. It won't use but a half-minute of Earth time."

"Then we'll take a swing at it," Dinty said.

Returning to the theater billing "The Romanos: A Tender Love Story," they were shown to seats by a smiling usherette with a ravishing figure. The feature was just beginning, and Dinty was gratified to see that it was in color.

Both the photography and the acting were superb, Dinty thought as the story unfolded. It was the pleasant saga of a love affair between a beautiful woman and a handsome man, and though Dinty found it entertaining in a rather unexciting sort of way, he inexplicably felt mildly disappointed when it ended. He was still mulling over the reason for this when they left the theater.

Suddenly it hit him.

"Hey!" he said, turning to Alice. "That was the old Hollywood formula. Boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl, boy-wins-girl. But they left out the middle. He never *lost* her."

"Of course not, silly. That would be conflict."

"Can't you have conflict even

in movies?" Dinty asked.

She shook her head. "Where there is conflict, someone always has to lose, hasn't he? You can't have a love triangle, even in a movie, unless you have a villain. And you won't find any villains here. *Everybody* must always be happy. Hence no conflict."

Dinty scratched his head. "I think I'd better have another nectar while I figure this out. Something seems haywire, but I can't quite put my finger on it."

He led her back into Clanahan's Tavern and ordered two more strawberry nectars. As they sipped them, he noticed a television set behind the bar and asked the bartender to switch it on. A baseball game was in progress.

Dinty watched interestedly as the camera focused on the batter. A ball sizzled across the plate, the batter swung and a high fly sailed far over the left-fielder's head. The man loped easily around the diamond for a home run.

"Man!" Dinty said. "You see that swat?"

Clanahan smiled and nodded his head.

The next batter stepped up, the pitcher sizzled another ball over the plate, and Dinty's eyes bugged as a second fly went over the left-fielder's head.

"Wow! Two homers in a row!"

"Oh, they're all homers," Clanahan said casually. "That's all

that any of them ever get."

Dinty stared at him. "What?"

"Neither team would want the other to lose, would they? So when all nine batters get their homers, they change sides and the other team bats out nine."

Dinty continued to stare at him. "You mean to tell me neither side wants to win?" he demanded.

"They couldn't without being selfish," Clanahan said reasonably. "The other team would have to lose."

For a long time Dinty remained silent. He watched four more homers on the television screen, then asked Clanahan to turn it off.

Rising abruptly, he took Alice's hand and said, "Come on."

ALMOST dragging her, he strode down the street to the nearest bowling alley. Inside, several alleys were in use, and Dinty stayed only long enough to discover no one ever threw anything but a strike.

Next he dragged Alice to a pool room, where they watched a player break, run every ball, then rack the balls for his opponent, who repeated the performance.

Dinty's eyes were narrowed and his lips were a thin line when he strode back into Clanahan's with Alice still being half-dragged behind him. Releasing the girl's hand, he laid both palms on the bar.

"Tell me, Mr. Clanahan. What do you do around here when you want excitement? I mean *real* excitement?"

"We don't want excitement," Clanahan said. "We want peace. Eternal, everlasting peace. The thing mankind has striven for since the dawn of enlightened thinking."

He smiled again. He had one of the friendliest smiles Dinty had ever seen, but for some reason it began to get on Dinty's nerves even more than the Earthly Clanahan's habitual scowl.

Dinty decided to try an experiment.

"I'll have a nectar, Mr. Clanahan," he said abruptly. "Cherry, if you please."

Obediently, the bartender poured him out a nectar.

Dinty raised the glass and contemplated it. "These glasses you serve your nectar in are a revolting shape, Mr. Clanahan," he said flatly, and flung it, nectar and all, to shatter against the nearest wall.

Still smiling, Clanahan raised a finger and the broad-shouldered waiter quickly moved toward the bar. Facing him, Dinty stood

spread-legged and waited.

The man merely smiled at him, then looked at Clanahan.

"These nectar glasses, Amuel," Clanahan said, pointing to a pyramidal stack on the back bar. "They're a revolting shape. Will you take them out and break them? Replace them with a beautiful shape."

Then he went over and began to sweep up the broken glass.

"My God!" Dinty breathed. "You can't even get into an argument with a bartender!"

He projected his imagination into the future, trying to visualize what it would be like to exist through all eternity without conflict of any kind, and the prospect appalled him. His eyes were enormous when he turned to Alice.

"Now I wish I hadn't come," he said. "It never occurred to me you could be bored to death in Heaven."

"Oh!" Alice said, surprised. "Did you want to see Heaven too?"

Richard Dering



Heads you lose

By WILLIAM MORRISON

Illustrated by CAYAT

*When it comes to mislaying things—
Anything and everything—
It's Georgie all the way!*

"If your head wasn't stuck on, I'll bet you'd lose that tool!" Sarcastic remark directed by Mmes. Smith, Jones, Cohen, Robinson and innumerable other mothers at Masters Smith, Jones, Cohen, Robinson and innumerable other sons, respectively.

LARRY'S head wasn't stuck on, but he hadn't lost it. At least, not yet. And he wasn't going to lose it, he told himself resentfully, no matter what his mother said. He might lose books and gloves and pencils and pens, and

even his little brother Georgie, but they were things that didn't amount to much anyway. His head—that was something different.

As for Georgie—that kid was a pain in the neck. He could never find his way and, if you so much as let him out of your sight for a minute, he was gone.

That was what had happened when they were crossing the woods. It wasn't his fault that Georgie had got lost, it was the kid's own fault. Why, when Larry was four, he knew his way around. He didn't have to be guided the way Georgie did.

And now, there was all this noise and carrying on, with his father running around calling the police, and his mother crying, and everybody looking at him as if he did something wrong, when it was all Georgie's fault.

He was glad when they sent him up to his own room to go to sleep, and locked the door on him to keep him from causing any more trouble. Not that he could sleep, but at least he was alone, and he didn't have people looking at him as if he had done something terrible.

"If they let me, I could find Georgie," he said to himself.

HE looked out the window and, in the darkness, he saw the beams of dozens of flashlights, as the searching parties were organ-

ized and sent out. He could hear dogs barking in the distance. Maybe they're bloodhounds, he thought, and resentment seized him. He had always wanted a dog as a pet, but his mother and father had never bought him one. And now, all those dogs, even bloodhounds, for Georgie! All that trouble and excitement over one kid who ought to be able to find his own way home, if he had any brains. "Grownups are jerks," he decided.

Suddenly, as he was staring out at the light flashing in the darkness, he felt himself slipping. He had never slipped this way before, and at first the strange sensation frightened and baffled him. His feet shot out from under him in one direction, his head lurched in another. Before he knew what had happened, his head was falling out the window.

He gave a short cry of alarm. His head—"Mother was right," he thought, "I've lost my head! No, that isn't so—I'm here—it's my body that I've lost! I've got to get back to it!"

No sooner thought than done—almost done, anyway. His head bopped up toward the window. But Larry's feeling of elation at the thought that he could fly made him overshoot his mark. Now he would have to drop down again, then float sidewise, to regain his body.

"But why?" he asked himself. "This feels good, this is real fun. Of course I've *dreamed* of flying—or was it more than a dream? Lots of times, when I'm just on the point of falling asleep, I seem to float out of my bed down the stairs and right out of the house. Oh, it's a great feeling, but not as great as this. No, sir, not as great as this."

He let himself drift away from the window. "I can go anywhere I want to," he told himself with delight. "Up, down, sidewise—even a bird can't do what I can do. But I still can't see why. How did I learn it?"

The answer came to him as he floated in a circle, thinking. "It's the practice," he decided sagely. "All those bedtimes, when I've been flying around with my body dragging after me, I've been learning how to do it. Just like I learned to swim with water wings. And when I *really* knew how, the water wings didn't help any more, they were in the way. Now my body is in the way. It was never absolutely necessary. Now, suddenly, I just can fly without thinking about it. It's all in the head. That's what does all the work of flying.

"Oh, boy, wouldn't Mother be upset if she knew. She talks about my losing my head—and I lost my body instead! What a joke on her! What a funny joke!"

"And you know what?" he add-

ed, carrying on the conversation with himself. "You know what would be even more of a joke? Suppose I used my head to find Georgie? *That* would show them! *That* would make their eyes pop open! Yes, sir, that's what I'm going to do!"

WHAT a surprise they'd have if they looked up and saw him! But nobody was looking, nobody noticed his head float gently away from the window. He kept it in the shadow, wherever he could, but nobody even thought of looking up. Only one of the bloodhounds bayed mournfully as the dark object flew by.

His head chuckled to itself as it flew gaily over the house—quietly, of course, because Larry was not yet ready to share the joke. His head grinned as it flew, with a burst of elation, over the lines of parked cars. It looped the loop quite unnecessarily as it approached the highway, then zoomed up out of the circle of illumination cast by a large light-bulb.

The men in the searching parties were wasting a lot of time moving back and forth, wandering around aimlessly as they tried to pick up Georgie's trail. "The dopes," he thought, "they'll never find him that way."

His head gave them an example of calm efficiency and wasted no time. It flew straight as an arrow

to the strawberry patch, where Georgie had lingered to pick the wild berries. Georgie was a kid who loved to eat, especially desserts. Larry's head would have grown hot under the collar—if it had had a collar—as he thought of how many times he had battled Georgie over who would get the larger dish of ice cream or piece of pie. And now it was a sure thing that, after he had got lost, Georgie would try to get back to those strawberries.

The trouble was that the patch was dark and a bit scary. There was only a half-moon overhead, and the sky was cloudy. The weak light that came through did little more than cast alarming shadows over everything. The strawberry plants looked like frightening gnomes crawling over the ground, and the few trees that Larry could see were like giants waiting to pounce.

Some of the elation had gone out of him. "Even a bigger kid than me would have a right to be scared," he told himself.

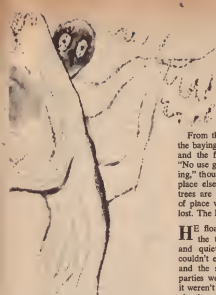
Something brushed his cheek, and his head leaped suddenly away. Then he heard a deep mournful whistle that almost seemed to be asking a question. "Who?" it demanded. "Who?"

"It's only an old owl," he told himself with relief. But the relief was only momentary. "Say, owls got sharp beaks, they can bite.



And I don't have any hands or anything. Suppose—suppose he tries to bite me?"

Another night bird flew by silently, visible only because it was a deeper black than the shadows. "Guess they're looking for insects," whispered Larry with relief. "They won't bother me. But if one of them does—I'll spit in his eye. I know I always tell



Georgie it ain't nice to spit, but in this case it's the only thing to do."

There was no sign of Georgie in the strawberry patch. If he was here at all, he was asleep, probably huddled up near one of the strawberry plants. "Georgie!" called his brother softly. "Georgie, where are you?"

No answer.

From the distance, Larry heard the baying of an occasional hound and the faint murmur of voices. "No use going where they're looking," thought Larry. "I'll go someplace else. Over there where the trees are thicker. That's the kind of place where Georgie could get lost. The little jerk."

HE floated slowly over toward the trees. Strange how nice and quiet everything was. You couldn't even hear a cricket now, and the sounds from the search parties were faint and muffled. If it weren't for having to find Georgie, it would be a real pleasure being here. There were none of the noises you were always hearing in the daytime—birds singing and insects buzzing and chipmunks chirping. Most of the animals were asleep, and those that weren't thought it best to remain silent. He could feel a slight breath of wind from time to time, but it wasn't even enough to rustle the leaves.

And then he saw it, only a dozen or so feet away, and stopped as if paralyzed in the air. First, his eyes opened wider than ever, and then his mouth, and then he yelled. An even shriller yell came from the thing he was scared of.

"*Georgie!*" he cried. "Is that you?"

What had scared him had been eyes, two great big eyes that seemed to be floating alone in the night. But that had been just a trick of the moonlight, because now he could see that the eyes were set in a dirty face, with two streaks running down them, probably from tears, and the hair above was tangled and full of burrs and fragments of leaves.

"L-Larry?" said a tremulous voice.

"Georgie, where were you? I was looking for you. Daddy and Mommy are looking for you, too."

"I got lost," sobbed Georgie.

"I told you to stick close to me. Anyway, we gotta go home now. You hold my hand—gosh, I forgot. I don't have any hand here."

"But I can't go home yet, Larry. I'm lost."

"You're not lost any more, dopey. I found you. I'll take you—oh!"

Larry's eyes stared. When he saw Georgie's face, he had thought at first—he hadn't realized. "Say you don't have your body here

either, do you, Georgie?"

"My feet hurted."

"Say, Georgie, I didn't know you could do that. I thought I was the only one who could send his head off by itself. When did you learn how?"

"I don't know," said Georgie. "Maybe my head wasn't stuck on tight enough."

"Not stuck on tight enough?"

"Mommy told me, if it wasn't stuck on tight enough, I'd lose it. So I guess that's what happened."

"You mean she told that to you, too?"

"Yeah," said Georgie. "Lots of times. Whenever I lost something."

"Why, I thought I was the only one she said that to!"

FOR a moment he was struck with amazement, at this evidence of the duplicity of mothers. He was willing to bet that they say that to all their kids!

Only they didn't know. If they really knew, what they'd say would be, "If your body wasn't stuck on, you'd lose that too." The head—why, that was you. You couldn't lose that.

They were too old, he decided, their memories weren't so good. He guessed they'd forgotten what it was like to be kids themselves.

His meditations were interrupted by a plaintive little wail from his brother. "Larry."



"What's the matter?" Larry asked impatiently.

"I'm hungry."

"You're always hungry. But you can't eat now."

"I wanna eat strawberries."

"You dope, we don't have time to eat anything. We gotta get home. Besides, without hands, you couldn't even pick any strawberries. You'd have to just try to eat them off the plants, and you'd get all scratched up."

"I'll cry if you don't let me eat them!"

"Go ahead and cry. See if I

care. I'll just fly away and leave you behind."

"I don't care," said Georgie stubbornly. "I like strawberries. I'm gonna find my hands and eat a whole lot."

"I won't stop you. But you're gonna get an awful licking if they find you eating strawberries in the middle of the night. Where are your hands and the rest of you, anyway?"

"Over—over there."

"Over where?"

"I don't know. I'll find them."

"You'll find them—oh, yes,

you'll find them! Don't you see how dark it is? We'll have to look all over this place. You dopey kid!"

Georgie closed his lips stubbornly, as he always did when he was insulted and wasn't quite sure whether he had given reason for the insult.

"And another thing," said Larry. "What if the men who are looking for you find your body first?"

"I don't care."

"You better care. I can just imagine what Mom will say to you. Come on, let's start looking." Larry was becoming worried.

But how did you look, when the light was so faint and the woods were so thick? Larry's head floated down closer toward the ground and Georgie, who, for all his defiant words, was very much afraid of being left alone, floated quickly after him. The ground was carpeted with leaves and twigs, and dried branches that had fallen off the trees. There were sinister-looking stumps and old dead trees that had long ago lost all their leaves and, here and there, Larry could detect a sour smell, as of wild cherries or mulberries that had fallen to the ground and rotted there.

"You wouldn't leave your body in a place like this, would you, Georgie?"

Georgie shook his head. It look-

ed funny, just turning there in the air, but the meaning was plain. They had to look elsewhere. That was all there was to it.

It would have been a lot easier if Georgie could have given him a hint as to where to look, but Georgie could never remember where he put things, and now the one thought that seemed to have possession of him was that he was hungry. Larry felt that nobody ever had such a dopey little brother.



THEY must have spent at least an hour, floating around and getting no place. And then, just as Georgie was becoming cranky and refusing to look any more, Larry was suddenly aware of the sound of voices, and the baying of dogs. "Hey, Georgie," he whispered. "We can't let them see us like this."

"I don't care," said Georgie. "I'm hungry. I wanna eat strawberries."

"They won't let you eat straw-

berries now. Come on, Georgie, come with me."

Larry tried to float up, but the branches happened to be thick where he and Georgie were, and he scraped his face. Before he knew what he was doing, he said loudly, "Ouch!"

A man's voice said sharply, "I thought I heard something."

Larry stared straight at his brother. He wanted to put a finger to his lips to warn of silence, but without fingers that was impos-



sible. So he merely whispered, "Shhhh! Do what I do, Georgie."

And he floated to one side, looking for a less thickly wooded space through which he could get above the trees, and trying at the same time to avoid the lights that were flashing all over the place.

The hounds must have scented them for, suddenly, they began to bark, all of them at once. At that, Larry flew a little faster and darted toward a clear space, above a tree that had been knocked down by lightning. No doubt about it now. The dogs must have caught sight of him, and they seemed to go crazy altogether. Larry put on full speed to get above tree level. Then he was skimming along and getting away from that place as fast as he could.

It was only when he felt safe again that he turned around to look. There was no sign of Georgie, and he thought, "Oh, gosh, I've lost that dopey kid's head again."

No use looking for it now, though. If Georgie's head went around looking for his and his for Georgie's, they'd be sure to miss each other. It always happened that way. Best thing to do was look for Georgie's body. Once found, that would stay put, at least until Georgie fitted his head back to it.

He was flying along a road now, a narrow rutted road that led

through the woods and, faintly, he heard a motor chugging. A car was coming. He didn't want to get caught in the glow of the headlights, and he rose almost to the level of the treetops, where he'd be invisible.

The car came along, the driver seeming to feel his way along the dark, narrow road. He was just about to pass, when something darted out silently past Larry's head. *Ugh!* he thought. *A bat!* And he jerked back to give the creature plenty of room.

The next thing he knew, he felt a crack on top of his head and was aware that he was falling. And then he went to sleep.

WHEN he awoke, he found himself bouncing up and down. He was on top of the car and his head ached. And the first thing he said to himself was, "Where am I?"

He floated up a little from the car-top and looked around. He was still in the forest, but this part of it didn't seem familiar. "I'm lost," he said silently. "First Georgie loses his body, then I lose his head and now I lose my own head. What a mess!"

He'd have to get back. The best way would be to follow the road. But suppose there was a fork in the road? Suppose he came to a crossroad? Which way should he take?

The driver would know, the driver would be able to tell him. Flying alongside the car, about on a level with the roof and a little to the left, Larry called out, "Hey, mister."

The car swerved suddenly as if the very wheels were startled. Larry heard a choking voice say, "Huh?"

"Look, mister," he said, "don't get excited. I just wanna ask a question. How do you get back to Elm Road?"

"Who—what . . ." The man gulped. "Lady, where did you come from?"

Lady? And then he realized. The man was judging from his voice.

"I'm not a lady, I'm a boy. I lost my way and I wanna get back to Elm Road."

"Where—where are you?"

"In your car. I sneaked in when you weren't looking."

Larry had a feeling that the man wanted to turn around. But he couldn't turn and drive at the same time. And he didn't want to stop. He wanted to get out of the woods and end this conversation as soon as possible.

"You couldn't have." The driver said in a shaky voice.

Talk about stubbornness, thought Larry, this grownup had it all over Georgie. Larry's head floated back and then, carefully, through the open back window and into

the car. Speaking close to the man's ear, from the right side this time, he said, "How do you think I got here then?"

The man almost jumped through the windshield. And then Larry saw what he was staring at. The windshield was pretty dusty on the outside, it served as a mirror, and there was just enough light from the inside of the car for Larry to see his own image. Evidently the man could see him too. But had he seen Larry's head float in?

Too late to worry about that. Larry said, "Let's not argue, mister. I wanna get back to Elm Road. How do I get there?"

The man licked his lips. "Straight back along this road."

"Any crossroads?"

"Just one. Take the right—no, the left. I took the right coming here. You take the left to get back."

"Sure about that, mister? I wouldn't wanna have to come back and ask you again."

"I wouldn't fool you. I wouldn't fool anybody like you."

"Thanks," said Larry politely, as his mother had taught him to. And he floated out of the window again.

THIS time the man must surely have seen him, for the car swerved so hard it almost bumped into a tree. Then it straightened

out again and picked up speed.

Larry picked up speed, too. He had to get back to Elm Road and then find Georgie's body. It would be terrible if the searching parties found it first.

As it happened, one of the members of a searching party did. That was what drew Larry's attention to it. As he flew over the treetops, he could hear the frantic barking of a small terrier, one of the dogs that had been taken along because there were only a few bloodhounds. There were no men around, so Larry flew down to investigate. The terrier was barking at Georgie's body, which lay on some dry leaves under a tree. It kept dashing at the body and then dashing away again, as if afraid.

"There'll be some men here in a minute," muttered Larry. "I'll have to act fast. I wonder . . ."

No use wondering, in order to *know*, you had to try. He let his head float down to Georgie's body. It wasn't a good fit, but it would do. Then he made the body stand up and start to run.

Georgie was only a little kid, weak and kind of clumsy. It was a nuisance to have his body slipping and stumbling all over the place. But he managed to get it to a tree and began to climb up. The terrier followed him, wildly barking all the while, and began to run in circles around the tree.



When he got high up, Larry wedged the body in between two branches and threw Georgie's arms tight around the tree trunk. Then his head flew off to find Georgie's head. He knew, now, exactly where to look. If Georgie ran true to form, he'd find him in the strawberry patch.

He was right. Georgie was there, trying to eat the berries, and having a terrible time because he had no hands to pick them.

"Georgie!" he called. "Quick, Georgie, come with me!"

"I'm hungry," said Georgie.

"Look, Georgie, I found your body. You can use your hands to pick the berries with. But you gotta come with me before somebody else finds it."

The inducement worked. Georgie's head followed his, and together they floated to the tree where the body had climbed. Down below, the terrier's barking had finally attracted a man's attention, and lights were flashing.

"Quick," said Larry, "get your head back on again. I'm going home."

And, without waiting to see what would happen, he rose into the air as fast as he could and flew home. "That was pretty close," he said aloud, as he edged through the open window.

FOR half of the next day, Georgie was a hero. He was so

brave, so smart. He hadn't cried at all—not much, anyway. And, to keep himself safe from wild animals, he had climbed a tree. Oh, yes, Georgie was quite a hero.

"He gets the credit for everything, and I always get the blame," thought Larry. "But just wait. It can't last. Sooner or later . . ."

It happened sooner—that very afternoon, in fact—when Mom gave Georgie a half dollar to go to the grocer's and buy some

bread. And, as usual, the half dollar disappeared.

Mom was pretty mad about it. "Losing things, always losing things. If your head wasn't stuck on, I'll bet you'd lose that too," she snapped at Georgie.

She didn't know the half of it, Larry thought happily.

William Morrison

ALL THE TRIMMINGS

Bold men may or may not be more virile than those endowed with hair. But according to superstitions from all over the world, they are the devil of a lot safer. The same goes for the ladies, too, in case they are wondering.

A common Irish custom, based on the Scriptures, is to hide oil hair combs in the thatches of cottages. If you know your Bible, you remember the statement that the hairs of our heads are numbered. Therefore, it stands to reason that we will be called upon to account for every one. Hence the thatch hair bank.

The Incas of old Peru kept their hair clippings, along with nail parings, in special wall niches for a similar purpose, according to Spanish historian Garcilasso de la Vega. Comes Judgment Day, they explained, everyone will have to show up with every hair and nail . . . and storage will avoid joining the general frantic search. Few countries do not share the belief.

Voodoo, however, extends it. Given a single hair and/or bit of nail, an efficient witch doctor in Africa, the West Indies or Louisiana will guarantee to induce anything from headache to heart failure in the careless former owner.

So, if you are the nervous type, don't worry that your barber might test the sharpness of his razor on your throat. As you can see, there are far less messy and incriminating methods. Keep your eye on the manicurist, too, of course.

Next!

HIGH MAN

low man

By R. BRETNOR

*Sometimes you have
to stand on your head to
discover which way is up!*

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

WHEN the stock market opened in the morning, Porson J. Godfrey controlled a major railroad network, the largest diamond mine in the world, and the financial system of an obscure but fruitful Latin American republic. At the close of business some hours later, he controlled only an untidy heap of punctured holding companies. His long and bitter struggle to reach the top, his relentless thwarting of

all competitive attempts to pull him down again, his proud years at the pinnacle of achievement—all these had come to nothing.

But the dark depths of failure were not for him. Despite the abruptness and magnitude of the disaster, he did not surrender to despair. Sitting at his splendid desk, he considered his predicament very carefully for several minutes before he decided, in the most businesslike way imaginable,

to foreclose on his life.

Not a single silver hair along Mr. Godfrey's precise center part was ruffled; neither twitch nor tremble marred the firm dignity of his features. Smiling a firm executive's smile, he pressed the button for his confidential secretary. Then he rose to his feet and walked to the largest window. He stood between the floor-length curtains that framed it, and gazed down through the glass at the criss-cross streets so very far below.

There, antlike men swarmed by the tens of thousands. There, not daring to assault the heights, they scurried about their everyday affairs. Porson J. Godfrey suddenly envied them the security of their low estate—only the voice of his secretary halted his hand as it moved involuntarily toward the latch.

HUBERT PIMPERNEL had crossed the deep carpet silently. Now, focusing impersonal spectacles on his pointed shoes, he waited mechanically for the word that would start him functioning.

Porson J. Godfrey turned. "Pimpernel, take a letter. Type it. I want only one copy. It will be delivered to my wife when she returns from Florida."

He went back to his desk, sat down, and waited for Pimpernel to be prepared. Then he dictated:

My dear Annabelle,

Everything I have worked and struggled for has collapsed under me, and I cannot face the prospect of starting all over again from the bottom. So I am taking what I am convinced is the only practical way out. I am sure that you will understand and forgive me.

I hate to do this to you, dear, but I know it's for the best. There is no reason why you should be dragged down. My insurance, which would otherwise be lost, will provide amply for you . . .

Porson J. Godfrey broke off sharply. The typewriter was silent.

Pimpernel had caught the drift. A simple and devoted soul, he had always identified his future not with diamond mines and bolding companies and Latin American republics, but with the continued well-being of Porson J. Godfrey. Horrified, he had opened his mouth to point out that his employer's suicide would leave him uncomfortably jobless.

"Well?" demanded Mr. Godfrey icily.

Face to face with authority, poor Pimpernel tried again to utter his warning. He began to stammer unintelligibly.

Porson J. Godfrey wasted no time. "Give me that letter!" he commanded. He reached for the paper and seized a pen. "And now get out!"

Turning in his chair, he began to write. He did not see Pimpernel hesitate; he also missed the min-

ute gleam of rebellion in Pimpernel's formerly obsequious eye.

With his own hand, Porson J. Godfrey added a paragraph of a purely sentimental nature. Then he placed the note in an envelope, addressed it, marked it STRICTLY PERSONAL—NOT TO BE GIVEN TO THE PRESS, and fastened it to his blotter with a paper clip. When he looked up again, his secretary had vanished.

There was no agony in Mr. Godfrey's heart when he left his desk. His step did not falter as he strode to the window. Never hesitating, he lifted the latch. He threw the window open. He placed one foot firmly on the low sill.

This was the point when Hubert Pimpernel stepped out from behind the curtain, where he was concealed, and hit him just above the left ear with a large, bronze ashtray.

Fifteen minutes later, quite unconscious, but suffering nothing worse than a mild concussion, Mr. Godfrey was removed to a private nursing home.

SOME time elapsed before Porson J. Godfrey's essential ego, realizing that his mortal mechanism had become inoperative, adjusted itself to what was really a rather radical change of perspective.

The room and the bed, though considerably more expensive than

those found in ordinary hospitals, were in no way remarkable; and the corporeal part of Porson J. Godfrey, snoring heavily on its bed-jacket, differed only in detail from other similar organisms similarly situated.

The odd thing about the whole business was that Mr. Godfrey, instead of being snugly *inside* himself, now occupied a locus best described as vaguely *around and about*. From this vantage point, he could clearly discern room, bed, and body extending into the past and future.

On becoming fully aware of all this, Mr. Godfrey experienced no alarm. In an indefinite sort of way, he understood that most of the organs involved in manufacturing fear and worry were, for the moment, out of commission. Just as indefinitely, he recalled that he had been interrupted in some urgent undertaking, the exact nature of which he couldn't seem to remember. Otherwise, he felt as alert and decisive as ever.

Looking about him, through interblending vistas which speedily became too complex to unravel, he eventually detected an extensive area of darkness just beyond his limit of clear vision. It excited his curiosity, and he determined to visit it forthwith.

Estimating its direction as roughly east-northeast of six o'clock, he turned sharply to the

right, and was there in a twinkling. An instant later, he entered a spacious three-dimensional chamber full of people.

That, at least, was Mr. Godfrey's initial impression; after a second glance, he revised it hastily.

It was true that they reminded him of people, perhaps because they had the same general air. But they reminded him even more of badgers. They were squat and powerful, with very short arms

and legs; and their stiff, coarse hair was much too liberally distributed.

To his astonishment, Mr. Godfrey saw that they were holding a board meeting.

THERE were about twenty of them, each wearing a toga made of something that looked like mutation mink, each sitting on his individual mutation mink cushion, each with his briefcase



by his side and his papers spread on the polished floor in front of him. Every eye was turned attentively to where the head of the table should have been, and where there actually was nothing but a sort of sunken bathtub, set in so it was level with the floor.

In it, with only his head showing over the edge, sat an old fellow with a definite look of Harold Ickes about him. He was talking eighty to the dozen, and his

topic was somebody named Jenkins.

This puzzled Mr. Godfrey; it seemed all wrong, somehow. Then he realized that English was not being spoken; that he was listening not to the words (which were, indeed, without meaning for him), but to the thoughts behind them. The name was not Jenkins. It was alien and utterly unpronounceable. It simply happened to have the same basic—well, flavor, so to speak, as Jenkins.

"Jenkins?" the old fellow was saying. "You can't tell me anything about Jenkins—we're fraternity brothers. For years, I've watched him going down and down, socially, morally, professionally. Take my word for it, there are no depths too low for Jenkins." Having made this pronouncement, he harrumphed once or twice, and glared around at his listeners. "Well," he growled, "let's have a vote on it. All who want Jenkins for General Manager say *aye*."

Mr. Godfrey smiled knowingly and made himself a little bet that no one would have the temerity to vote for Jenkins. The response, when it came, caught him a bit off balance. Voting as one man—or as one badger—the Board sent twenty enthusiastic *ayes* resounding through the chamber.

Mr. Godfrey was appalled. He could have sworn that the Chair-



man had been quite serious—yet they had immediately elevated the disreputable Jenkins to a position of responsibility!

There could be one answer only: The Board was hatching some nefarious scheme, in which Jenkins was to have a part. Never in his life, thought Mr. Godfrey, had he beheld anything quite so shameless.

Mr. Godfrey thought this thought aloud—very loudly indeed—and the reaction was instantaneous. Abruptly, the room was hushed; every eye turned toward him.

The Chairman stood up in his pit, took one look, and snarled something about damn foreigners and the woods being full of 'em.

"What do you think you're doing?" he demanded. "Can't you see this is a private meeting?"

MR. GODFREY, having believed himself imperceptible, felt embarrassed.

"I just happened in," he explained lamely. "I'm a stranger here . . ."

"I can see *that*," sneered the Chairman.

There were one or two other remarks: "What do you suppose it is?" and "That's what comes of leaving the door open!"

"Let's get this straight," protested Mr. Godfrey. "Can you really see me?"

"Certainly we can," said the Chairman. "You look like cellophane."

"But I can't see myself!"

The Chairman laughed nastily. "Is that any excuse for barging in and insulting us?"

Tenuous as he was, Mr. Godfrey began to get his dander up.

"You listen to me!" he snapped. "I didn't know about your absurd meeting, and I certainly don't want any part of it. In fact, I don't like the way you do things. First you denounce this Jenkins as completely worthless; then you make him General Manager. I must say that I think it's some kind of racket!"

"*What's that?*" The Chairman stared at Mr. Godfrey in open-mouthed astonishment. "I denounced Jenkins? Why, Jenkins is a splendid fellow—loyal, efficient, incorruptible. He has worked his way to the bottom of his profession. He's the lowest of the low!"

There were cries of "Absolutely!" and "That's right!" from the membership.

Mr. Godfrey struggled against confusion. "Are you trying to kid me? If Jenkins is such a fine fellow, why do you talk as if you all looked down on him?"

"Because we *do* look down on him," answered the Chairman. "Don't you look down on any successful man?"

"Yes—I mean no!" cried Mr. Godfrey shrilly. "No, no, no! You've got it all wrong! People look up to successful men. They admire *high* ideals. They want to *rise* in the world. That's the goal in life—to reach the *top*!"

FOR a moment, there was utter silence while everybody gaped at Mr. Godfrey in bewilderment. Then a portly gentleman sitting near the pit leaned over and whispered in the Chairman's furry ear: "Completely disoriented! The poor chap doesn't know up from down."

The Chairman nodded in agreement. "That's it! Maybe they can straighten him out over at the Bureau."

"They can try," said the other. "As an alien, he'll have to be classified anyway."

"I'll call Miss Carmichael," declared the Chairman. With that, he pressed a button. "You'll be all right, friend," he assured Mr. Godfrey pityingly. "They get cases like yours almost every day . . . Ah, here's Miss Carmichael now. She can take you right over."

Miss Carmichael was slightly smaller than her male counterparts, and more delicately whiskered. Instead of a toga, she wore a mutation mink Mother Hubbard gathered in where her waist should have been. Mr. Godfrey was disturbed by the fact that

her name was really no closer to Carmichael than Jenkins's had been to Jenkins.

"Miss Carmichael," said the Chairman, "would you mind taking our . . . um . . . tourist here up to the Bureau? He's lost his bearings, I'm afraid."

"Okay," said Miss Carmichael.

Mr. Godfrey started to protest. He argued that there was nothing wrong with *him*; that he knew which way was up, all right; that they were a pack of numbskulls. But nobody paid any attention.

Miss Carmichael waddled over to him, smiled with a great many very sharp teeth, and said, "Don't worry, sir. We couldn't hurt you if we wanted to—you're too immaterial. Come along now."

Reluctantly, Mr. Godfrey recognized the accuracy of this statement. He hesitated for a moment. Then, with a shrug, he followed her out of the room, across a hall with a brass cuspidor in it, into a very ordinary elevator.

Miss Carmichael turned to the control panel and pressed the top-most of about a hundred buttons. She shivered as they started.

"Brrr-r!" she said. "It scares me, going up like this. I never could see why they have to have the Bureau in the basement. Why, it's almost at the surface!"

"Are we underground?" exclaimed Mr. Godfrey.

Miss Carmichael gave him a

funny look. "My!" she said. "You really are off your trolley, aren't you?"

HALF an hour later, Mr. Godfrey was poised over a mink cushion in the office of the Chief Classifier of Alien Entities. He was looking down on this functionary, who sat in a nicely upholstered pit very similar to the one which the Chairman had occupied.

The Chief Classifier wore old-fashioned, narrow spectacles; he would have done marvelously as an illustration for *The Wind in the Willows*. But in spite of this, and in spite of the fact that he had been very pleasant and polite to Mr. Godfrey, they were getting absolutely nowhere.

"No, no, no!" Mr. Godfrey was saying for at least the twentieth time. "You have to *rise*. You have to climb *over* obstacles. You have to *overcome* difficulties. I've struggled upward all my life. I've fought my way to the *top*—to success, prestige, fame!" He paused. "There's something I have to do when I get back. Something urgent. If I could just remember, I'd explain. Then you'd understand."

The Chief Classifier sighed. He shuffled his notes. He decided to try another tack: "Look here, you evolved from something, didn't you? From some higher form of life?"

"From a *lower* form," corrected Mr. Godfrey.

"Let's say less advanced," amended the Classifier hastily. "That's the point, anyhow. So did we. Man is to monkey as we are to—"

"Badger," said Mr. Godfrey.

"Not quite, but it's close enough. Now let's go back a bit and I'll show you where you got turned around."

"I didn't," asserted Mr. Godfrey stoutly.

"Never mind," said the Classifier. "Now imagine our primitive ancestors . . ."

Mr. Godfrey imagined them.

". . . living in their shallow burrows perilously near the surface. Their backs are armored with thick hair. They are only beginning to walk erect. Their incoherent grunts are not yet speech. Their thoughts are dark and blurred. But the first glimmerings of intelligence are there. The long drive downward has begun."

"Upward," said Mr. Godfrey.

THE Classifier ignored the interruption. He was warming to his subject.

"Imagine them!" he cried. "Each male striving to dig a deeper den—for only at bedrock can his brood be safe from natural enemies, the stoat and weasel tunneling from below, the silent serpent. Only at bedrock can he

feel secure against his own savage kind, who then must come upon him from above . . ."

"That's all wrong," said Mr. Godfrey. "The primitive always tried to get *above* the other fellow—up in a tree so he could crack his skull with a rock."

"Tsk-tsk," sympathized the Classifier. "Mere mythology. Why do you suppose the chief always took the deepest burrow and the lowest seat in council when the tribes were formed? Because he had the power to make certain of his safety, and because he wanted to have an advantage over the others. So wasn't it natural for the primitive to associate height with insecurity and weakness, depth with strength and safety? Wasn't it natural to carry the idea a step further—to identify lowness with authority, with virtue, with success? No, you can't get around it. It's in full accord with nature."

"It isn't, dammit!" shouted Mr. Godfrey. "It's just the opposite!"

"Please, please!" The Classifier's voice carried a reproving note. "Civilization happens to be based on just these concepts. They provide the pattern for our social system. They determine our evaluations. The slaves who dug the deep cities of antiquity out of solid rock were chained in the highest levels of society. The barbarous emperor whom they served bore the proud title of His Abysmal

Lowness. Finally, our most debased minds used the same scale in their abstract thinking. They plumbed the bottomless depths of science, philosophy, and ethics, thus giving us mechanical progress, social reform, political enlightenment. Surely, you must see the logic of it."

Mr. Godfrey tried desperately to cope with all these strange ideas.

"Sure," he said, "I can see your logic. But you're all wet. You have it backward. Slaves were the *lowest* class. Kings and emperors were called Your Highness. Science and philosophy and all the rest of it are the *highest* achievements of the human mind." He was beginning to sound a bit dubious, even to himself.

He subsided into silence.

"GOODNESS!" said the Classifier. "You are a hard case. I've never seen such a completely upside-down view. Usually it's only partial and subconscious—merely a question of confusing the concrete and the abstract." He shook his head. "We can deal with those easily enough if we get to them in time."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Godfrey suspiciously.

"Well," said the Classifier, polishing his spectacles, "take success, for instance. We can't possibly measure it in feet and inches, but we speak of it as *low*

because our language evolved that way. If anyone is especially successful, we say that he can't go any lower."

"You mean *higher*," said Mr. Godfrey uncertainly.

"When we say *lower*," persisted the Classifier, "we use a concrete term as a pure abstraction. It's very convenient, too, but it does have its perils, because it's so easy to confuse the concrete and the abstract. Why, we get some cases who can't distinguish them at all. Usually the worst are those who start at the very top, spend their lives fighting their way down, and then lose out. The 'bottom of the pile' is more than just a symbol of success to them—it's something concrete, where they feel as safe as the primitive at bedrock. Then, suddenly, that safety just isn't there, and some of them can't stand it. Subconsciously, they seek security right back where they started—up top, where they never had to worry about losing anything. There was a most unfortunate business just the other day . . ."

Pausing, the Classifier blew his nose softly and sadly.

"Name of Pettigrew," he resumed. "Nice chap, too. Before we could stop him, he'd crashed an express elevator right into the roof. He perished instantly."

The Classifier reached for his pen and a printed form.

"Now," he said, "we'd better start classifying you. We can finish straightening you out later on. First, what is your name, age, sex, place of birth, and occupation?"

"Wait—wait a second!" cried Mr. Godfrey. "I feel something—something pulling at me—like a rubber band!"

"Oh-oh!" said the Classifier. "Are you leaving us?"

"I—don't know—" yelled Mr. Godfrey. And, just as he said it, there came a *whoosh* and a swirl of light and sound.

For a fraction of an instant, he glimpsed the hospital room in its solid dimensions. Then there was a soft but definite click.

Mr. Godfrey was back inside himself.

PORSON J. Godfrey awoke with a remarkable headache, but with no sign of permanent damage, and with no recollection of where he had been.

Blinking up at the nurse who sat beside his bed, he asked, "Where am I?" tritely enough.

"My head aches," he remarked, and after a moment added, "I feel swell."

What he really meant, of course, was that he no longer felt like jumping out of the window—that the very idea of suicide had, indeed, become abhorrent to him. Then he went to sleep.

Mr. Godfrey slept peacefully until late the following morning, when he was interviewed by his personal physician and two psychiatrists.

Nothing, he informed them indignantly, was further from his mind than self-destruction. He admitted that he had, in a moment of folly, contemplated some such action—perhaps as a result of shock. But all that was over. Surely they didn't think that he, a practical man, would continue to confuse abstract concepts and concrete realities?

Though Porson J. Godfrey couldn't quite recall where he had picked up that particular point, he pressed it long and warmly. The psychiatrists, however, were not easily convinced. They insisted on keeping him in the nursing home for three whole days, enabling him to mull the entire situation over thoroughly.

When they finally released him, he went straight back to his office. He found it, luckily, still undisturbed by the furniture movers.

First, Porson J. Godfrey walked over to the window and peered down through the glass at the crisscross streets so far below. He shivered.

"That," he said to himself, "is a remarkably long way down."

He then went back to his desk, found the letter to his wife still fastened to the blotter, opened it

and reread it. Frowning, he sat back in his chair.

"What on earth made me write *that*?" he grumbled.

He tore up the letter and threw it in the wastebasket. Reaching into the drawer, he found some paper and started it over again:

My dearest Annabelle,

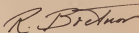
I have lost all my money, much as I expected to; even my insurance will have to go to settle up. Unlike the average man, however, I do not feel unduly disturbed by this occurrence. We shall retain possession of my Uncle Hannibal's old farm in Vermont, where we will undoubtedly be able to make an excellent living raising turkeys. We can take my secretary, Hubert Pimpernel, with us to do the rougher work, and I think it advisable that we start immediately, so that we can be established before winter sets in. You had better hurry back here as fast as you can.

I repeat, my dear, that I am not in the least dismayed . . .

Porson J. Godfrey paused. He bit his pen and finished swiftly:

"In fact, I feel higher than a kite.

And then he smiled a firm executive's smile, because it seemed like such a silly thing to say. But his smile grew less firm, more amused, for that was just how he did feel.



Illogistics

When peace came to the

Colonel—it was a declaration of war!

By STEWART KASER

Illustrated by BALDWIN

PUT two ice cubes in a glass, add a couple of ounces of good whiskey, then spray lightly with soda. When you have about half a swallow, exhale sharply through your nose with a snorting noise. Then you will have an accurate picture of the way Colonel Gregory Stout, U.S. Army, retired, looked and felt as he saw Robin Goodfellow climbing up one leg of the coffee table.

The trouble was that Robin was entirely outside the Colonel's frame of reference. This frame was not nearly so narrow as the

Colonel's political opinions might lead you to suppose. It included his cottage and ten acres of land in the San Fernando Valley, Mrs. Brom, his housekeeper, an irascible cow named Dorothy, the Hitching Post Tavern and an aged Irish setter named Sergeant. But it did not include elves.

"*Whoof!*" snorted the Colonel. The good whiskey sprayed expensively over his jacket. He fumbled for his handkerchief. "Hatcha, hatcha, *choof!*" he continued. He set his glass down and covered his face with the handkerchief, taper-

ing off with a muffled "*Whch, whch, whch!*"

Robin, who was now standing on the top of the table, observed him with polite concern. "A slight estarrh, maybe?" he inquired. The Colonel did not answer, but finished with a disoriented sneeze, which Robin Goodfellow chose to accept as an affirmative reply. "Struth," he continued, "'Tis the north wind that stirs these darker humors in the blood. An excess of bile, no doubt. The remedy—a cup of mulled sack. What's this?" He sniffed the glass. "Whiskey, by my beard!" He took a sip and availed himself of Sergeant's left ear as a napkin. "As for me, I prefer milk," he said.

THE Colonel stared. Robin was approximately one foot tall. He wore a doublet of russet leather, hose of Lincoln green and a scarlet codpiece. His cap had a feather stuck in it.

"Who the devil are you, sir?" demanded Stout.

"I am a sprite, a tricky fairy, an elf. Some call me bobgoblin, and some 'sweet Puck', but my true name is Robin Goodfellow." He doffed his cap and made a sweeping bow. "Your most obedient servant."

"Haff! Pfaff!" snorted Colonel Stout to indicate his disbelief. Elves were outside his aforementioned frame of reference, and he had

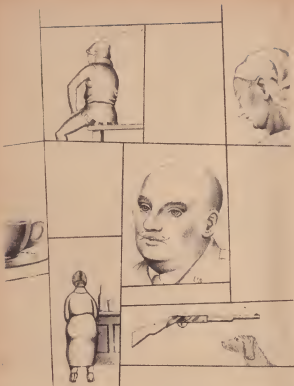
conceived the notion that Robin was some kind of unusually small midget, bired by his enemies, dressed in a sprite's suit and sent out especially to plague him at the end of a particularly trying day. "*Fairies!* So you're a fairy, are you?"

"You must dismiss the thought, which would occur only to a vulgar mind," ebided Robin. "I'm a true fairy—an elf. I'm a merry wanderer of the night. The wisest aunt telling the saddest tale, sometimes for a three-foot stool mistaketh me. Then slip I from her bum, down topples she!"

The Colonel's eyes began to glow with cunning. "I happen to know that Puck is an English elf. This is America—San Fernando Valley. Only a few miles from Hollywood."

Robin sighed. "Hast heard of 'austerity'? 'Slife! There's been little enough milk in old England this half-score and more years past. A drop, perchance—but I have no what-call-you-it—ration card. Time was, mortals left a dish for me each night. Alack, no more. This Irish sprite, a banshee by trade, told me about America. She'd made her pile, so to speak, and now she was retiring to Innisfree. Had a job keening on some radio program. A sop opera, she called it.

"'Robin, me lad,' she said to me—you know that poetic lilt the



Irish have to their speech. 'Robin, me beautiful bully, it's to America ye should be goin', Robin. If it's milk you're after wantin', then America's the place for the likes of you altogether. Faith and be-gorra!' So over I came, flying between the cold moon and the warm earth. And I found me a cow, and found me a mortal who leaves me a dish of cream every night, and the finest hollow oak tree for a house that ever was. Ah, I'm a happy elf, Colonel Stout. You'll meet few elves as happy as I."

"Dammit, sir," roared the Colonel, "I'll meet no elves at all. There are no such things! *Poppycock! Humbug!* Who'd be such a fool as to leave a bowl of cream for an elf?"

"You, of course," replied Robin. "And grammercy to you, I'm sure. That's one reason I've taken up residence in the oak tree at the bottom of your pasture."

"What?"

"You do leave a bowl of cream in the cowshed every night, do you not?"

"That's for the milk-snake."

"Milk-snake?"

"A kind of snake that sneaks into the shed at night and milks the cow. I've put poison and milk in a bowl each night for it."

"A snake that milks cows?"

"Of course."

Robin shook his small head in

horrified disbelief. "'Swounds, 'sblood, and odds bodkin, man! Surely you don't believe *that* old wives' tale. That's the rankest superstition! Why, the veriest peasant knows better than that!"

"How dare you, sir!" The day-long series of irritations and outrages was now culminating in an insult to the Colonel's intelligence. "How *dare* you!" He stamped his foot. "I've put up with enough nonsense for one day! Of course, there are milk snakes. This blasted reptile steals milk from my cow! That's why I leave the bowl out each night!"

ROBIN shrugged. "I thought it was for me. But bowsobeit, I'm he who drinks it. 'Tis a puzzle to me, how such an ill-humored old beast can give such sweet milk."

"You couldn't have drunk it. I put poison in it!"

"Of course, as poison, it boots me naught, since I'm immortal."

"Nonsense! *Poppycock!* Trouble, nothing but trouble all day!"

"Ah, but that is why I am here! 'Tis the custom of good fairies like myself to repay a kindness by smoothing mortals' paths. Your path needs smoothing, I take it?"

Stout's mind went back over the events of the day. It had been full of difficulties, enemies, attacks on his peace of mind, outrages, calamities, very like all the days of the

Colonel's life, only worse.

It had begun early, with his housekeeper's obstinacy and ill temper, when he had returned from his morning walk ready for breakfast.

"This is not coffee," said Colonel Stout.

"Yes, that is coffee," said Mrs. Brom.

"It's too weak," said Stout. His idea of a proper pot of coffee was drip grind, boiled mercilessly to extract all the tars and resins. "Brom," he said, "I cannot drink this stuff. Take it away. Use it to water geraniums . . . or something."

Mrs. Brom took it away. In fifteen minutes, she returned with a pot of drip grind, boiled mercilessly to extract all the tars and resins. She poured his cup full and watched with loathing as he drank it.

"Just don't call it coffee," she said ominously. "Oh, I can make it like you want it. I could boil beer and Hershey bars together, if that's what you wanted to drink. Just don't call it coffee, that's all."

"This is coffee as coffee should be," said the Colonel, also ominously.

"You want some bicarb now?"

"I want you to attend to your duties and leave me in peace!"

"Be careful it doesn't dissolve your plate. I don't know what it is. It isn't coffee, though. Just don't

call it coffee, that's all I care." Mrs. Brom went back to the kitchen. Colonel Stout drank three cups of the brew and finished his breakfast.

Afterward, he accompanied Mrs. Brom through the house on his usual inspection tour. He looked at the bed critically. The covers were smooth, the pillow cases clean. He removed a dime from his pocket and dropped it on the bed. He turned to her accusingly and said, "Brom!"

"If you're waiting for me to jump to attention, you've got a long wait. You're not in the army any more, *Mister Stout*, and I never was in the army . . ."

"It didn't bounce," said the Colonel. He slipped a probing forefinger into a corner fold and pulled. The tuck came undone and hung limply. "Not taut," he muttered. "It should be done like this—lay it up *so*. Fold the corner *so*. Tuck it in here and haul taut—*so*!" He remade the bed. When he was finished, it looked like a drum-head. He dropped the dime. It bounced.

MRS. Brom was unimpressed. "Are you going to sleep in it, or are you going to stay up all night, bouncing dimes on it? Every morning, I make this bed, *Mister Stout* and, every morning, the covers are pulled out. Not just one place, but all around. You kick

them out. You wouldn't have room to get in if you didn't. Why make a hed so you can't even get into it?"

"That, Mrs. Brom, is the way a hed *should* be made. That's the way the Army makes heds, Brom, and the Army has made more heds than you'll ever make. That's the proper way to make them, the way mine has always been made, and it's the way it's going to be made, Brom, now and in the future. Do you understand that?" Quite naturally, he was shouting. And, naturally also, by the time he was finished, he was nose to nose with his housekeeper. She did not yield a millimeter.

"Who are you yelling at, you had-tempered old hull? You think you scare me, mayhe!" she shouted. "You think I'm like a private in the Army you can push around. It's a wonder to me this country ever won a war in its life, with you running anything. Making heds, maybe. Making heds while our boys were out fighting in the fox-trenches. I won't put up with it! I'm a good Christian woman, and I *quit*!"

"You're *fired*!" roared Stout, furious that she had quit before he could fire her. They both stamped to the door, still shouting at each other.

"Bouncing dimes on a hed . . ."

"Incompetent, insubordinate and . . ."

"A grown man . . ."

"Can't even brew a cup of coffee . . ."

They reached the door. "Bring a pound of coffee when you come in tomorrow," Colonel Stout shouted in the same threatening tone he had been using all along. "We're nearly out."

"Same brand?" inquired Mrs. Brom in a menacing shout.

"*Naturally!*" roared Stout.

"Just don't call it coffee, that's all!" shouted Mrs. Brom. She stamped down the path to the gate as the Colonel stamped back into the house.

Yes, he thought, his path could use a little smoothing. But Brom wasn't the worst of it. There was, for example, the raid on his apricot trees, a raid that was a small part of a larger hassle—a war, in fact.

The war between the Colonel and the small boys of the neighborhood was a classic war of epic proportions. Generations of boys had raided the Colonel's apricot trees. To join the hassle was the ambition of every seven-year-old, and the older boys cherished the raids as special memories.

There was a large body of oral history passed down among them. Most of it was legend some of it was myth, and a little of it, as is proper in all histories, was fact. They remembered Tommy Jorgensen, who had heroically pelted the

Colonel with apricots while the rest of the gang escaped. They remembered wily Manuel Ortega, who had beguiled Sergeant, the unfortunate Irish setter, with a realistic imitation cat fight. And they spoke often of Danny Ryan, whose spectacular diversionary tactics included tying a skyrocket to a model airplane and setting it off in the Colonel's front yard.

Handed down with the legends was a rigid set of ethics. For this was not war as war is fought nowadays—a simple extension of the barroom brawl. This was the siege of Troy. The boys never attacked, if the Colonel was not at home. They could seduce the dog, but not try to hurt him. The only legitimate prizes on the Colonel's place were apricots, and these must be taken a few at a time, so as to make them last through the entire summer vacation.

FOR the Colonel was an opponent worthy of their steel. At other places, the dogs were vicious, or the owners used some contemptible expedient, like telephoning the boys' parents or, worse yet, inviting the boys to take all the fruit they wanted.

Not Colonel Stout.

He laid plans. He set traps. He ambushed, marched, counter-marched, outflanked, enfiladed, fired and fell back, sapped, mined, counterspied, deployed, skirmished

and attacked with tremendous noise, exquisite style, and all according to the rules and laws of war.

On this particular morning, Colonel Stout spied raiders in his apricot trees and rushed into the house for his shotgun. This shotgun figured large and fearfully in the boys' legends, and it had, as a matter of fact, an extended history of its own before it ever appeared on the field of battle.

To begin with, the Colonel had shouted threats to fill the backside of every one of the little blackguards with rock salt the next time he showed his face—an anatomical paradox on which the Colonel did not deign to elaborate.

To make this threat good, he had carefully removed the shot from a number of cartridges. He never did get around to replacing the shot with rock salt, but he arrayed the castrated shells on his mantelpiece as an earnest of his puericidal intentions. Nor did he load the shotgun. In fact, he plugged the barrels, muzzle and breech with corks, and removed not only the firing pins, but the triggers as well.

Even so, he was too good a soldier to be careless with guns, and he could not bring himself to point a weapon at anything he did not seriously intend to kill, even though this entailed carrying his piece butt foremost. It was handy

for brandishing, however, and he brandished it fiercely today, as he had brandished it for ten years past, and with the same amount of enthusiasm.

"Blast you little monsters!" he shouted. "I'll pepper you good! Circle around behind 'em, Alf," he yelled over his shoulder. "We don't want any of 'em to get away!" It was the Colonel's policy to conceal his numbers by shouting streams of orders to invisible benchmen, who were referred to as Alf and Charlie, respectively.

"Keep your head down, Charlie," he roared, "don't show yourself! You can grab 'em as they go by! Stay out of my line of fire, Alf! I'm going to blast 'em!" The Colonel never changed these names, and, as the lieutenants never appeared, you might suppose the boys would have long since penetrated the ruse. But the effect was just the opposite. Alf and Charlie had become terribly real, although rather inconsistent. Alf was a dwarf, a giant or a witch—Charlie was a peg-legged sailor, an enormous dog, a ghost or even the Colonel himself, in disguise.

"We got 'em surrounded, men!" howled that worthy now, wrathfully. "Start closing in!"

Bill Spooner, current leader of the raiders, swung down from a tree. "I aim to let daylight through yuh," he snarled. "Saddle up, fellas. We're pulling out!"

"*Holt!*" yelled Stout fiercely. He brandished the butt of the shotgun.

In one smooth throwing motion, Bill had his cap pistol out of its holster. Fanning the hammer with his left hand, he laid down six shots, rapid fire. "Take to the hills, fellas!" he screamed. The boys scurried to the garden wall in a ragged line. They were up it, on it, and Bill started drifting back as Stout advanced. The Colonel's ears reddened.

"You idiot!" he roared. "Don't you know enough to count your rounds as you fire 'em? Now I can blast you before you can reload!" He aimed his gun-stock straight at Bill's middle. Bill's ears reddened, too—with embarrassment—and he fled. The whole gang dropped to the other side of the wall and ran furiously to escape Alf and Charlie. Colonel Stout himself never went further than the wall. He bellowed as long as they were within hearing, and, only then subsided reluctantly into irate mumbling.

BUT the day was to be as full of trouble as a turkey with stuffing, and the day wasn't over yet. In the evening, Stout strolled down to the Hitching Post Tavern to soothe his nerves with a quiet bottle of ale. He should have remembered that he would encounter the barmaid, Wilhelmina Schmiss-rauter.

Wilhelmena was fat, strong and ugly as a halibut. At the age of eighteen, she'd had a proposal from a drunken sailor, who took a good look at her the next day and left town. He remained a temperate man for the rest of his life, a moral by-product of the affair which, strangely, did nothing to improve Wilhelmena's opinion of men. She was convinced they were deceivers, one and all, especially military men . . . and particularly sailors.

. She had arrived at a peculiarly logical conclusion that Colonel Stout was some kind of Admiral in disguise, and probably a Communist to boot—maybe even a Democrat.

"What'll yah have?" she inquired. The question was, of course, unnecessary. The Colonel always had ale—the same brand, at the same table, at the same time, every day, every week, every month. He was not a slave to habit. It was the kind of ale he wanted, and he wanted it at a particular time of day. At every other place where he bought anything, his requirements were known and respected.

But not at the Hitching Post.

The Colonel fixed Wilhelmena with a look that had given ulcers to a whole generation of Second Lieutenants, and replied, "The usual."

Wilhelmena shifted her weight

negligently to one foot—a change that had tragic repercussions on the family life of a group of termites living in a joist two yards from where she stood—and asked, "Usual what?"

The Colonel slammed his fist on the table. "You know very well usual what! *Ale*, blast it! Brown ale that comes in a bottle, *blast it!* The kind I drink every evening, woman! And not too blasted cold, either!"

"What brand d'yah drink, Corporal?"

STOUT'S ears, which had been a fire-engine red, turned a rich royal purple at the lobes. They had been the same color twice before in his life, and had resulted, the first time in a court martial, and, the second time, in a bronze star. His blood pressure at this moment would have made a very comfortable head of steam for one of the smaller locomotives.

"Green Cap," he said in a strangled voice, barely discernible above his gnashing teeth.

"Got some good Carlings tonight," said Wilhelmena.

The Colonel was silent. He swallowed twice, slowly. But he did not forget tactics—he changed them. "Wilbelmena," he said, "I have misjudged you. You have been making a special effort to please me, and I have been rude to you. You are a good girl, Wil-

helmena, a pretty girl." The Colonel's voice had become silky and somewhat sinister. He ogled her and twisted the ends of his mustache to points.

Wilhelmena reared back, sniffing suspiciously. "Let's you and I go someplace tonight," Colonel Stout trumpeted. "Let's you and I go to a motel!"

She staggered back a step. The eyes of the rest of the customers were on her like spotlights. She fled, returned with the bottle—Green Cap it was—and set it on the table.

"You wicked old man," Wilhelmena sobbed in terror and admiration, "don't you dare touch me!" She fled again, leaving our hero in possession of the field. The Colonel poured his ale and chilled incipient applause from the other customers with a flick of one frosty eyebrow.

YOU could call it a victory. "But why should a man have to put up with it at all!" Stout found he was shouting at the mere thought of it.

Pack spread his hands expansively. "You don't," he said. "Say the word, and your irritations are at an end. Your enemies will be your servants."

"Confound it . . ." began Stout.

"That's the word," said Robin. "Consider it accomplished. I'm not unappreciative, and, certes, yours

is the tangiest milk that e'er I've tasted."

"Get owl!" shouted Gregory. Robin's aplomb was unshaken.

"Your servant, sir," he said, and made an elegant sixteenth-century bow. "Watch this disappearance," he continued. "I would make Houdini look like a slob!" And, with that, he was gone.

The Colonel finished what he could salvage of his drink while racking his brain for an attitude or opinion about elves. He found none—except that he didn't believe in them. To most people, this opinion would have seemed unsuitable in view of the interview just ended, but Colonel Stout's opinions were his oldest and dearest friends, and he refused to abandon one of the most cherished of them for a foot-high pipe squeak in a scarlet codpiece. "Humbug," he grumbled, and stamped off to bed.

The next morning, having spent an unusually restless night, full of dreams which were completely outside his frame of reference, the Colonel returned home from his morning walk in a tearing rage. He sat down at the table. Mrs. Brom scurried in and poured a cup of coffee. "Ah," he thought. "Just let that incompetent old harpy cross me today! Just let her try! I'll line her up against a wall and shoot her! I'll soon show her who's in command here! I'll . . ." and he raised the cup to his lips.

It was not Hershey bars boiled in beer. And it was not coffee, either. It was drip grind, boiled for fifteen minutes—black as sin and much more unpleasant—just the way he liked it. The shock to his constitution was considerable. "*Hahhpf! Hahhpf!*" he grunted to cover his confusion. He set the cup down.

Mrs. Brom leaned forward anxiously, but not so far forward as to be considered impertinent. "Is everything all right, sir?"

"No Brom, *everything* is not all right. This, however—" and he held up the cup—"is coffee. You've come to your senses, have you, Brom?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"This is coffee, Brom!"

"Yes, sir!"

HER lack of resistance was an obvious trick. Stout was not going to be so easily trapped. He pressed his advantage toward total victory.

"Not what you call coffee, but *coffee*!" He filched a sidelong glance at her to see how she was taking it. She was standing well, not exactly at military attention, but straight certainly, and, had she been wearing trousers, her thumbs would have been aligned with the seams.

"Yes, sir," she said again. "Are you ready for the rest of your breakfast now?"

"Certainly. Bring it in. *At once!*" Mrs. Brom scurried out and returned with breakfast—at once. Everything was in order. The head of steam which Stout had generated during his walk was still unexpended. He finished eating, had two more cups of the coffee-type liquid and stamped into the parlor to begin inspection.

There was no dust. The carpets had been beaten inhumanly clean. The furniture was surgical. He rubbed his fingers over the window sill. Nothing. He lifted a corner of the carpet and scrutinized the floor underneath. Nothing. He wrenched the sofa away from the wall and looked behind it. Nothing, nothing, nothing!

"Harumph," he muttered, and stamped into the bedroom. As he fumbled in his right trousers pocket, he became aware of Mrs. Brom's hand extended in front of him. In it was a dime. He accepted it. He dropped it.

It bounced.

The Colonel turned to Mrs. Brom and did a strange and terrifying thing. He smiled. "This is satisfactory, Brom," he said.

"Thank you, sir." She got her hat and hurried out to do the shopping, breathing very hard. Stout strolled about the house with his hands in his pockets muttering to himself.

"Hmm . . . complete change. Unlike her . . . like magic. Magic,

Hah! Discipline, that's what does it. Showed her . . . odd. Path smoothed, like that what's-his-name said . . . Robert something . . . no good at names . . . short chap . . . unconventional Elf, he said. Possible? From England . . . maybe in England . . . keen on tradition over there. *Humph*—hmmm. Fixed old Brom. Possible? Maybe. No . . . maybe though . . ." He rocked on his toes and glanced out the front window. The boys' gang was grouped about the front gate, and Bill Spooner was jiggling the latch tentatively.

"*God!*" cried the Colonel. "*A raid!*" He rushed into the den and scooped up the shotgun. He rushed out, bumping a vase, which teetered alcohologically, but miraculously regained its balance. Cunningly, he dashed to the back door. "Double back," he panted to himself. "Take 'em on the flank, take 'em in the rear! Got 'em surrounded! Chance of a lifetime! All hunched up." Then, scornfully, "One mortar shell would get the lot!"

He opened the back door quietly, tiptoed out, slammed the door and dashed through the orchard to the garden wall. Sergeant, wakened suddenly from a deep dream of peace, leaped to his paws and labored asthmatically in the rear. Stout stashed the emasculated shotgun carefully on the other side of the wall and climbed over. Then

he had to climb back, as the unhappy Irish setter was unable to get over by himself.

"Come on, blast you!" Stout whispered fiercely. "If you'd exercise once in a while—keep yourself fit . . . *push* a little, blast you!" At last, the dog toppled over to the other side in a series of disorganized and floppy sections.

"*Hah!* Now follow me, Sergeant." The Colonel's mustaches were standing up at acute angles, quivering at the tips. Man and dog, they crept along in the shelter of the wall until they could see the boys gathered in a restive little group in the front yard. Bill Spooner was at the door.

THEN Stout made a tactical error. He stood erect—plainly visible. He could have gone all the way to the gate and taken them at close range. Perhaps his victory over Mrs. Brom had made him overconfident. He could see his life stretching out ahead of him, a series of paths, all smoothed magically by the amiable and industrious Mr. Goodfellow.

"*Hah!* There you are, you little blackguards!" he shouted, joyously brandishing his shotgun. "*Now* I've got you! Watch the gate, Alf. Stay where you are, Charlie! We've got 'em surrounded! Don't move, boys, or it'll be the worse for you!" He climbed to the top of the wall and there waved his weapon gallantly.

"Follow me, men!" he cried and dropped to the ground.

Sergeant wisely decided to go the long way around to the gate, so the Colonel was unfollowed as he charged the last thirty yards to the enemy, hallooing instructions to Alf and Charlie and threats to the boys, on alternate exhalations. He came to a startled halt in front of the group. Sergeant came skidding around the turn at the gatepost and, not at all sure what was expected of him, came to a point.

Nobody had run.

"Hah! *Hah!* Well! *So!*" The Colonel snorted. He was playing for time. Didn't the little fools see that, if they suddenly scattered, he could not possibly catch them? "Caught you, eh? Keep under cover, Charlie, in case they make a break for it!" he called over his shoulder. "They might try to scatter!" Bill Spooner walked reluctantly over to him.

"Now then, Spooner, what's the meaning of this? Trying to steal my apricots, eh boy? A raid, is that it?"

"No, sir," said Spooner.

Ah, thought the Colonel, The boy's not so stupid after all. They detain me here while a small patrol comes in from the rear and makes off with the loot! He began to edge around to a place where he could get a view of the orchard. "What is it then? Speak up, lad."

Bill searched for words that he

had difficulty finding in his arrogant vocabulary. He finally got it out, as if he were disgorging golf balls.

"We're—sorry," he said.

"*What!*"

"We're sorry, sir. About the apricots. Taking them, I mean." Then he added miserably, "We had a meeting."

"A what?"

"Meeting, sir. We talked it over, and we decided it wasn't right to take your apricots. We decided they were *your* apricots."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. And we've been taking them for a long time now. We didn't mean any harm exactly." The apologies put Stout in a torment of embarrassment. A day ago the boy had had gallantry, dash, leadership—*guts*, by gad! And now, he was a sniveling lick-spittle!

"We don't know exactly how many we took. We never kept track. But we had a dollar and eighty-three cents in the treasury." He put the money—all in change—in the Colonel's hand. "That'll pay for some of them. And we won't take them again—not ever."

The Colonel swallowed. "Not ever?" he repeated.

"No, sir." The group twitched about hopelessly. "Well, good-by, Colonel Stout, *sir.*" said Bill.

"Good-by, sir." said some of the others. Manuel Ortega patted Ser-

gant on the head with one hand and wiped the bottom of his nose with the back of the other hand.

"G'by, Sergeant," he said.

"Good-by, Sergeant," said some of the other boys. They slowly filed out through the gate. The last one in the somber group shut it carefully.

The Colonel watched them walking away, but at last they were all out of sight. Then he walked back into the house, his head bent forward.

"Hah," he said. "*Hah!* Well, I guess I won't have any more trouble from them—not ever."

IT was a strangely subdued Colonel Gregory Stout, U.S. Army, retired, who made his way slowly to the Hitching Post that evening. He did not take saber cuts at the weeds with his stick. He did not mutter curses under his breath or concoct mental plots for the undoing of his numerous enemies. There didn't seem to be any need.

Once outside the door, however, he tugged his drooping mustaches up to points and squared his very slightly out-of-square shoulders. Let that Wilhelmena Schmissrauter try tangling with him tonight! He'd show her. He had allies—powerful allies! The Colonel sighed.

Then he opened the door and walked in. He seated himself at his usual table and roared, "*Barmaid!*" He looked up to find Wil-

helmena already standing at his side.

"The usual, sir?"

Stout swallowed with some difficulty and made a feeble effort to get himself into a temper. "Yes," he said. He waited in lonely melancholy until she returned with a bottle of ale—Green Cap.

"No head, mind you!" he growled plaintively.

"Oh no, sir." She poured it with no head. Stout's mustaches drooped a quarter of an inch. He pulled them desperately up to attention and rolled them to rather frayed points.

"Well, Wilhelmena, that's better," he rumbled. He leered at her dispiritedly. "Now, then, my girl, when are you and I going to go out together and do a little tour of the saloons? We might wind up at a motel too."

Wilhelmena leaned close over him with a shifting and regrouping of masses of weight that was alarming. "Tonight, Gregory? I got off work at twelve." She smiled joyously in the manner of a codfish.

"*Ahharrghh!*" exclaimed Stout in unmilitary panic. He scuttled his chair backward as far as the wall, but he was too weak to rise from it. Wilhelmena returned to the bar with a coquettishly swinging gait which was immediately reflected in a similar movement from the chandelier. She tipped her head over her shoulder and winked.

This brought Stout to his feet. He was out the door in less than a second—and then he was leaning against the wall, breathing deeply and perspiring. With as much haste as a bowed and elderly gentleman could manage, he made off toward home, resting at intervals and leaning on his walking stick. "Oh Lordy!" he whispered. "Lordy, Lordy me!"

HE rested a long, long time at his own gate, a forlorn figure in the chaste and gentle light of the moon. He was muttering, "Who would have thought it? Whoever would have thought it? An elf," he said. "A little magical elf. A smooth path . . . removing all my obstacles. Goodfellow, that's his name . . . remembered it after all. *He did it.*"

There was a pause.

Then, a sudden and horrible change swept over Stout's face. "*He did it!* The filthy, meddling, no-good scoundrel! Elf indeed! *Blackguard! Monster! Fiend!* Remove my obstacles, will he? My obstacles, not his, the prying little cur! What's he mean by it? The audacity! *Hah!* We'll see about *this!*"

With his blood pressure back to normal, that is up to 160, he marched fiercely down to the cowshed and disappeared into the dark interior. There was a loud thump,

as might have been made by someone bumping his shins on a sawhorse in a dark cowshed. There were several curses, such as might be uttered by a man who has bumped his shins on a sawhorse in a dark cowshed. There was a short silence—then, there was a loud crash, such as might have been made by a breaking bowl.

Stout emerged from the shed, limping slightly and smiling a grim and terrible smile. Over his shoulder, he carried an axe, and the moonlight glinted on the blade as he marched inexorably to a hollow oak tree in the south west corner of the pasture. He paused, balanced strongly on the balls of his feet and swung the axe high. Robin Goodfellow was about to have a housing problem.

THE next morning, Colonel Gregory Stout, U.S. Army ret., was in the geometrical center of a wall-shaking brawl with his housekeeper when Sergeant began barking furiously. It could mean only one thing.

"A *raid!*" shouted Gregory. "They've come back to steal the apricots!" And, with a smile of joy and thanksgiving on his face, he ran for his shotgun.

Stewart Kaser

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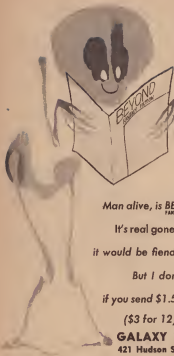
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I'd give a dollar

By WINSTON MARKS

*One buck buys a steak or a
desert island—and the
only string is yaul*

Illustrated by KOSSIN

MY cubbyhole office was restful—too restful. My leather contour-chair was cool and comfortable—too comfortable.

I didn't have an idea in my head.

So I said the magic words, as I had many times before—even as you, perhaps, have said them, entirely innocent of their fantastic power.

I muttered them to myself, yet they were overheard.

The door, which I kept locked, opened. A smallish man in a dark

wrinkled suit came in, pulled up my desk chair, sat on the edge of it and began speaking.

It was early in the day, yet his shoulders drooped with weariness, and depression lined his ageless face. His eyes were rimmed with red as if he hadn't slept, and he had the untidy air of one whose preoccupation with his problems is ruining his health and peace of mind.

Before he had said a dozen words, I reached out and flipped on my tape-recorder and adjusted the volume input.

This is what the miserable, sweating little visitor said:

I WAS sluing in a booth at Winkle's, listening to the ball game on his little plastic radio—Winkle is too cheap to put in TV—and stretching a couple of beers as many innings as I could before the big barkeep started glaring at me.

Sanders hit a home run which ruined a no-hitter for that cocky pitcher, Hubb Crabtree. This gave me much pleasure, and I said to myself, "I'd give a dollar to see Hubb Crabtree's face right now!"

I said it very softly, but the customer in the next booth got up and sat down across from me. He outlined a big square on the table with his hands.

The piece of stained table-top between his hands lit up like a TV picture-tube, and there was Hubb Crabtree's egotistical profile pointed at third base, watching Sanders head for home.

I was too startled to enjoy the look of disgust on Crabtree's face. The stranger withdrew his hands and the picture faded out, leaving me staring at more familiar cigarette burns and wet spots.

He said, "That will be a dollar, please," like a bored waiter. He was seedy-looking, well dressed, but sort of crumpled up and dissipated, as if he didn't give a damn.

"A dollar for what?" I asked.

"You said it would be worth a dollar to see Hubb Crabtree's face, didn't you? I showed you Hubb Crabtree's face."

"Well, I—" The fact was, I had just two dollars in my pocket to last me until the next day, payday. I'd eat pretty skimpy if I gave one to this hocus-pocus artist.

He said, "It will be to your advantage to pay up."

"What if I don't?" I asked. He wasn't especially big—more like an office-worker or a salesman.

"Your name is Carlson and you are a janitor at the First National Bank. You're starving on what you make a week. Right?"

I guess I nodded. It jarred me to have a total stranger read back my vital statistics.

He said, "It happens I need one more client for my quota. If you pay the dollar, you'll go on my route list."

I relaxed a little. So it wasn't a shakedown racket, after all—just some razzle-dazzle solicitation comeon.

I told him, "I don't need any, thank you."

"Any what?" he asked with a funny expression.

"Whatever you're peddling."

He sighed like a clerk who's fed up with his own canned sales talk. "I'm a broker, not a peddler," he said. "I'll deliver almost anything you can think of for a very

modest fee. Normally, you can even name your own price, as you just did."

IF this was salesmanship, it was a new wrinkle to me. My curiosity was aroused, but not a dollar's worth. I said, "Sorry. I'd rather watch television than be hypnotized into thinking I was watching it. Your act is clever, but I expect that TV is a little more reliable."

He figured I was slipping off the hook and he seemed to be making up his mind about something. Finally he said, "Our regular service is limited to one call per day. But as an introductory offer, you may have another deal right now—included in the price of the first one. Just give me the dollar first."

"Deal?" I repeated.

His face got red and his lips tightened up. He said very patiently, "Name whatever you'd like right at this minute. I'll provide it and not bother you until you call me tomorrow."

I was tempted to shoot a buck just to see what would happen. And then I had a brilliant thought. I said, "Okay, I'll give a dollar for a big steak dinner with all the trimmings."

He seemed relieved. He nodded and asked, "Medium?"

"Huh?" I said.

"How do you want it cooked?"

He enunciated the words with exaggerated movements of his lips.

I went along with the gag. "Make it rare."

He held out his hand and said, "The dollar, please."

I gave him the one-spot, 50% of my wealth, and edged forward, ready to protect my investment if he didn't come up at least with a hamburger and some potato salad. He crumpled the bill into a tight ball and tossed it up into the air. It didn't return.

When I looked down, the stranger was gone, but there was a white linen tablecloth and was it *loaded!*

There was a T-bone, rare and sizzling, the juice oozing out with a rich buttery aroma. And there were French fries, radish rosebuds, little green onions, rolls, tossed-green salad, a huge piece of banana cream pie and coffee.

I couldn't have ordered a more beautiful layout if I'd studied a menu all night. I grabbed a steak-knife and slashed at the thick tenderloin side. If this was hypnotism, I wanted to find out in a hurry.

The first bite was so juicy, I almost choked. And *tender?* That steer was slaughtered before he got over his operation!

WINKLE heard my knife and fork. He loomed up like a palsied elephant. When I was head

teller at the bank, my wife and I used to go deep-sea fishing in Florida each winter. Once I caught an eight-foot shark whose expression when we boated him was a lot like the one Winkle was wearing just then.

He gaped and snapped his false teeth. He poked a long finger into the hot meat to see if it was real. Then he sucked his finger and fixed me with his black eyes.

"This," he said, "did not come out of my kitchen." Which was a laugh. Nothing but a bowl of pretzels or a dead bagel or a tired-looking bougna sandwich ever came out of Winkle's kitchen.

I kept waiting for the steak to disappear like the TV picture of Hubb Crabtree, but it didn't. It seemed embarrassingly permanent. From the look in Winkle's eye, I was not.

"We don't allow basket parties here," he said.

Nothing I could think of to say sounded sensible, so there was only one thing to do before the gigantic Dutchman did it for me.

I removed myself quickly from the premises.

It was sixteen blocks to the First National and I had time to dwell on the way I had squandered my dollar. Once I was considered a stable, hard-headed banker with some promise, but that was before I cracked up. The shock of my wife's death at the

bottom of an empty elevator shaft, plus the sudden removal of her rigid moral restraints upon me, had led me into the more earthy type of distractions.

This was a luxury I couldn't afford in my position. The bank officials quickly noted my changed habits and they chose an inopportune moment to demand my reformation or my resignation. I was suffering a hangover that bleak morning and I told them what to do with their sight-drafts, their spare change and my job.

Then I withdrew my savings and my wife's insurance money and invested them in a life of forgetfulness. Since I was only thirty-one at the time, my money ran out before my life-span. At thirty-seven I returned to work at the bank, dead broke. All they'd trust me with was a broom and a mop, but I was hungry.

Three years of application got me a raise of four dollars a week, so at the time Winkle cheated me out of my glorious steak, it was a tragedy I couldn't dismiss lightly.

I WAS bitter and resentful when Mike, the watchman, let me into the bank. Steaks didn't grow on trees nor on Winkle's tables. What right had the big bastard to deny me what was mine? What if it was his place of business? I had bought two beers already and I had a perfect right to be there.

As the beer wore off, I began to consider the incredible source of my steak in retrospect. Supposedly, I had entered into some kind of agreement by paying the stranger my dollar. If he could whip up a dinner like that on a second's notice, what could he do with, say, a five-dollar bill and an afternoon?

I got so engrossed with my thoughts that it was midnight when Mike said, "You're behind schedule, friend. You been sweeping the same spot for two hours. Ya sick or something?"

I looked at the clock and started emptying wastebaskets. Out in the back corridor at the refuse chute, I debated with myself. After midnight, it was a new day. Should I test out my new business connection and put my mind at ease that the whole thing was just a figment?

I said quietly, "I'd give a dollar for . . ." Heck, I didn't have a whole dollar! I had stopped on the way over and spent seventy cents on a plate of greasy meatballs and spaghetti. I had intended to ask for another fabulous meal, since I hadn't had enough change left over to get a box lunch.

Then the solution came to me. I said, "I'd give a dollar for twenty-one one-dollar bills."

All hell broke loose. The bank was well-protected with burglar alarms and the stranger must have set off every one of them.

Anyway, there he was, holding out a stack of money. He looked extremely unhappy with me. I should have been pleased, but if you have ever heard a battery of bank alarms go off at once, you'll understand why the money didn't look so inviting at that moment. Bells clanged and sirens whooped.

The stranger shoved the currency at me impatiently and I took it with trembling hands. He stuck out his right hand for his pay. I lifted a dollar bill from the stack and handed it to him, just as Mike threw the alarm cut-off switch.

The sudden silence was so shattering that I dropped the money all over the floor. The stranger, oblivious of the stir he had caused, calmly rolled the bill into a ball and tossed it into the air. It fell back to the floor.

He shook his head. "Not acceptable," he said.

My teeth were rattling with nervousness, but I had lost a steak dinner because I had refused to argue and I wasn't about to lose this bundle by default. I asked, "Isn't it genuine?"

"Oh, quite!" he assured me. "But the ruling is that ownership doesn't pass to you until you have paid the fee. This bill isn't yours to spend yet."

MIKE'S heavy footsteps clattered toward us on the marble. I swept up the money and

pulled the stranger over into a dim corner.

"Wait here," I told him. "I'll have it for you in a second."

"You have two minutes," he warned me. "And if you fail, our arrangement comes to an end. There are enough clients who value my services without having to wait around like this."

I ducked out between the vaults to head Mike off. He skidded around a corner, revolver in hand, and he almost shot me.

"Hold it!" I yelled. "Lend me a dollar, will you, Mike?"

The old Irishman assumed he had heard me wrong and demanded, "What happened? Who did it? Did you trip the . . ."

He took a look at where we were and realized I was nowhere near the critical circuits. He moved off up a flight of stairs shouting, "Stay where ye are and ye won't get hurt."

A voice behind me whispered, "Fifty seconds left."

I CURSED silently. I was surrounded by millions of dollars, and I couldn't raise a single lousy buck.

"Look," I said, "why can't I change the terms?" I brought out the thirty cents I had saved for carfare. "How about giving thirty cents for three one-dollar bills?" Somehow I figured that was a better bargain for him.

He took the coins reluctantly, listened to their pitiful jingle, shrugged his shoulders and tossed them high in the air.

They didn't come down. The money rustled in my hand and all but three bills disappeared. So did the stranger.

When Mike came plunging down the stairs, looking puzzled, I handed him my broom and said, "I resign."

At that moment the police arrived. They held me for questioning for an hour. Mike had become suspicious and as he let me out he said, "I'm thinkin' you're a queer one, Carlson."

They picked me up again not long after daylight and I spent a miserable day with the bank people at the police station. I did get two meals out of it, but the food was cooked by somebody who hated his work and it gave me indigestion. But being held saved me money, which was lucky. The bank was holding up my pay until they were sure nothing was missing.

The following day, they phoned me to say that I could pick up my pay envelope. Funny thing, it was the same manager who had asked for my resignation some nine years ago. He sort of half apologized for my rough treatment and he even hinted that my old broom was awaiting me.

I told him to take my pay en-

velope and put it the same place he had put my teller's job the first time I quit the bank. Also the broom.

I spoke with considerable conviction, for occupying one third of my living room was a comforting, neatly stacked bulwark of one-dollar bills. They were in bundles of 100 and piled up like cordwood, head-high, on either side of the door to my bedroom. I didn't even bother to count the number of rows, being quite content to trust my new business associate.

After all, this was the result of an investment of a single dollar, and if it inventoried a little less than the million dollars in ones I had requested—well, there was more where this came from.

THE transaction had been completed just before the bank called. The stranger had appeared promptly at my loud assertion that I was willing to pay a dollar for a million of the same.

It sounded silly to my own ears, but the stranger made no fuss. He took the bill he had refused two nights ago, wadded it up and said simply, "It's a deal."

Having been cold sober for forty-eight hours now, my wits were fairly clear. I stipulated that the money be in ones, conveniently banded and placed against the wall where I wouldn't be forever stumbling over it.

What I overlooked was something I should have remembered from my earlier banking days. A million singles weigh three and a half tons!

My little flat was over the Pastime Pool Hall, housed in an ancient frame building. It was when I turned from the phone and went over to select a couple of bundles of bills for pocket money that I discovered my own 145 pounds on that section of the decrepit flooring were enough to make it creak and sag. I got off that spot fast.

My stomach was growling for breakfast, so I went out in the dingy hall and down the wooden stairs that were swept only when the debris got thick enough to impede the rent-collecting progress of big Steve Morton, my landlord.

Which reminded me I'd better pay him the twenty dollars I owed him or he might go poking around my flat with his skeleton key, as he had done on a couple of occasions.

Stalling my appetite, I turned into the smelly pool hall. The counterman hooked a thumb to the rear. A floating crap game had drifted into the back room and big Steve was indulging. I worked back among the pool tables and passed through the flimsy partition.

A dozen men in shirtsleeves and pants with baggy knees crouched around one corner. Steve

had the dice, ready to roll them into the corner, when he looked up and saw me.

He stood up stiffly and pointed to the center of the room where a piece of old yellow plaster was smashed all over one of the felt-covered card tables. "What the hell ya doing upstairs?" he demanded. "Moving in a piano or something?"

I looked up and realized we were directly under my flat. There was a visible sag in the ceiling and a hundred cracks radiated from a spot of bare lath.

The players yelled, "Come on, chuck the dice, Steve!"

He said, "Not until I collect from this jerk. I want my rent and fifty bucks to patch up that ceiling and get whatever's so heavy to hell out of my building before . . ."

A truck rumbled up the street, shaking the old fire-trap to its foundations. Powdered plaster sifted down. Big Steve looked up and his eyes bulged. I backed away just in time.

The rotten joists gave way, the ceiling opened and Steve Morton got his back rent and repair money—with interest.

I suspect they were still digging him out when I arrived at the airport.

MY plane was letting down for Seattle when a worrisome thought caught up with me. Would





the stranger be able to find me so far away? Not that I had any choice about leaving town, but I had only twenty dollars left after buying my plane ticket.

By the time I paid limousine fare into Seattle, checked into the Olympic Hotel—money in advance, because I had no luggage—and overtipped several people to convince them I wasn't a bum, I was down to less than eight dollars.

But it was a new day. I sat down at the pretty oak desk and did something I wasn't used to. I tried to think.

"I would give," I said cautiously, "a dollar for ten genuine twenty-dollar bills, to appear in the inside pocket of the coat which I am now wearing."

This was the supreme test. Would he be able to find me?

He did—but his face was livid. "It's my fault for not warning you," he said snappishly, "but hereafter you must give forty-eight hours' notice when you leave town."

He took the dollar I had ready for him and a reassuring wad bulged from my pocket. He turned to go.

"It will take two days to arrange your transfer to a new agent out here," he said. "Don't expect more service until then."

His attitude made me curious. His sharp irritation nettled me.

I said, "What's in this for you?"

He fidgeted, but he seemed compelled to stay and answer me. "Is there any doubt in your mind whom I represent?" he asked.

I said, "No, there's no doubt in my mind who your boss is. But before I make use of your services again, I must know this: Have I in any way committed myself or my-soul?"

He shook his head.

"Then why do you go to so much trouble?" I insisted.

"Having been in business, you can figure that one out, too," he said. "It isn't the transient transaction that counts. It's the repeat business we're after."

He disappeared before I could ask another question. *The repeat business?* It made a sort of grim sense. By continually leaning on the dark powers like this, I would become dependent—and sooner or later they'd trap me.

For the first time in my life, I faced the reality of hell and I'll admit it frightened me. I had to get what I needed, once and for all, then sever all connections.

My gaze fell upon the front page of the *Post Intelligencer*, left on the dresser by the management. Underneath a heading "Have You Seen This Man?" was an unflattering but all too recognizable picture of me!

My hands trembled so violently I could barely read the terse story. I was wanted by the Treasury

Department and it was believed I was in Seattle. There was a reward!

THEY were moving swiftly. The telephoto would be followed by T-men and my trail was well blazed with hot one-dollar bills.

From the pool hall they must have back-tracked to the bank, picked up my I. D. picture, checked the airlines and the depots asking a single question: "Anyone buy a ticket with a bundle of brand-new ones?"

I was wanted. *Badly!* And if they ever caught me and nailed down my connection with the million dollars in Big Steve's back room, they'd hound me forever, no matter how many times the "agency" helped me escape.

In panic, I abandoned my luxurious quarters and walked a lot of blocks down into skid row, where I found a cheap hotel on Washington Street. The sleazy room clerk apparently hadn't read the morning paper, because he handed me my key without a glimmer.

I went out and returned with enough food to last me two days, then returned to my room, where I began laying plans. I worked out my next transaction with pains, taking hours to phrase my request properly.

By late afternoon of the following day, it was complete. But I worked on, revising and perfecting

details until midnight. When the big clock on the tower of the Union station showed one minute past twelve, I drew a deep breath and said my piece.

"I would give a dollar to be removed to a remote and deserted island in the South Pacific Ocean, said island to contain the following."

As I began my itemization, my locked door opened and closed, and a tall, unkempt, flat-chested woman of about thirty came in. She lifted her hand, palm outward, but I withheld the dollar while listing the advantages I desired on my island retreat.

I almost ran out of breath before I wound up with, "And a tropical wardrobe and a case of Haig & Haig." Still holding the dollar, I inhaled and added quickly, "And I wish to give formal notice to the 'agency' of my removal to the foregoing location, so as to incur a minimum interruption of service."

I handed over the dollar. She took it and said, "Well, ain't you the cute long-winded one?"

She rolled up the bill, but when she tossed it at the cracked ceiling, it came down again. She stared at it for several seconds as if listening to something I couldn't hear. The bill slowly uncrumpled on the threadbare carpet.

Then she looked up and said, "Glad you're gettin' the hell out

of my precinct, buddy." She picked up the money, rewadding it. "There will be a change in our service after we deliver you to your island," she warned. "We will be on call only weekly."

"What's this now?" I objected.

She said, "Well, you can't expect the same service out in the middle of the ocean that you get in town. Anyway, you've ordered enough whisky and stuff to last you a month. I hope this is agreeable to you?"

It would have to be. I nodded. She picked up the balled dollar and looked at me wistfully.

"Wish I could go along," she said as she tossed the bill in the air. I shuddered at the thought.

The subject of suitable female companionship was one which would take an even longer period of thought than my supply list. Certainly I wanted no devil-ridden hag like her. Just the same, I felt sorry for her.

Suddenly I was staring not at an unshaded light bulb, but at an immense orange tropical moon.

WHAT a night! What a place! It was like the steak at Winkle's — perfect! Undeniably a dollar well spent.

For the first time in days, I relaxed. I strolled up the white sand with the gentle surf ruffling and sighing behind me. Inside my little dream-cabin, I sought the modern

kitchen and the shelf of whisky bottles arranged in neat rows.

The air-cooled light plant putt-putted away softly out back, sucking gasoline from a buried tank. At the touch of a twitch, the kitchen lights went on and the refrigerator purred contentedly.

I opened a fifth of the fine Scotch and toasted my genius. Having for years been unable to afford anything more than beer, I felt the higher-proof stuff hit bottom with a delightful warmth. But it smarted my throat. I reached for the cold-water tap on the gleaming porcelain sink. It squeaked faintly from its newness as the handle turned easily.

But no water came out.

I jerked open the door under the sink and stared in dismay at the pipe from the taps. They ended in thin air. I had remembered the salt and pepper, books and radio, food and bedding, home movies and fishing tackle, clothes and shoes, aspirin and insect repellent. I had overlooked only one item.

Water.

By the third day, I had exhausted all obvious possibilities. Wisely, I had not taken another drink of whisky, but even so, after seventy-two hours, I was beginning to burn up with fever.

The refrigerator had no ice-cubes. I had hoped to collect some condensate from the cold coils, but it was one of the latest self-

defrosting models and the humidity was so low that not even dew would gather on the cold walls.

On the blisteringly hot morning of the fourth day, I thought of the fishing tackle and the stories of how Navy men had survived shipwrecks by squeezing the juice from fish. Being new at this surf-casting, I was all day coaxing one little bony specimen out of the salt water.

My crude methods of masbing it up yielded only about a third of an ounce of the most delicious nectar man ever tasted—but it soaked into my parched tongue and throat before ever reaching my stomach.

Three more fish in the next two days kept me from collapsing before I did. But six hours before midnight of the seventh day, I slumped to the sand, too weak to hold the rod any longer.

The cloudless days gave no promise of rain and the tropical vegetation was as parched as I, so I lay on the edge of the surf, awaiting midnight or unconsciousness, whichever would come first. The thought of the beautiful amber expensive Scotch whisky on my shelves was a bitter mockery of my improvidence.

SOMEHOW the time passed and at last my watch showed midnight—the beginning of the seventh day. I drew in my swollen

tongue and croaked, "I'd give a dollar for a swimming pool full of cold fresh water."

Long minutes passed before I heard the swish of footsteps in the sand. A bosun's mate, first class, in undress whites, strode up and looked at me out of annoyed, sleepy eyes.

"Yer out of luck, mate," he told me. "The 'agency' at the Naval Base says what you ask just ain't practical."

"Why?" I tried to shout, but it came out a harsh whisper.

He yawned and scratched his thick body and said, "Water's one element we don't fool around with in quantity. It just ain't—compatible with the executive personnel of our organization, like they say."

"All right," I squeaked. "Just a well or a spring!"

He said flatly, "That's still too much."

"Then a glassful." I screeched. "Just a glassful!"

He yawned again and said, "I guess maybe we can manage that." He turned and a large goblet of water sparkled in the moonlight.

I held out a dollar, but he shook his head. "We've gone to considerable trouble to bring this water all the way from Hawaii," he told me. "I'm afraid a dollar isn't enough."

Here it was at last. "Take all the money I have, then."

His head still shook.

I rose to my knees. "What in the name of God do you want?" I demanded.

He stepped back, spilling some of the precious water. "Watch your language!" he said. He reached up under his white middy and withdrew a document. He handed me a fountain pen. "Sign on the dotted line on both sides of the sheet," he said.

I recoiled from the first side. "I thought so," I screamed at him. The luminous letters were large, easily readable and terribly explicit about *the disposition of my soul*.

"Turn it over if you don't like that proposition," he told me.

The contract on the other side made no mention of my soul. Worded pleasantly, it offered, among other things, immortality until "*Such time as you seek other arrangements.*"

It was plainly labeled CONTRACT TO ENTER SERVICE OF H. R. M. L., but I was too far gone to quibble. I signed it and reached for the goblet. The water was tepid and unsatisfying and I forced myself to take it slowly. Between sips, I asked what the initials "H. R. M. L." stood for.

The sailor capped his pen, slipped the contract up under his middy blouse and said, "You have just entered the perpetual service of His Royal Majesty, Lucifer. You know," he added, spitting

through his teeth into the surf.
"Old Nick. The Devil."

Yes, I knew. The water burned in my shriveled stomach, as it has ever since.

THERE was silence in my office while a shudder passed through the tired little man in the dark suit. He held out his hand. "That will be one dollar, please."

I slouched forward from my contour chair and turned off the tape-recorder.

"How's that?" I asked. "How come I owe you a buck?"

The man sighed fretfully. "You made the offer. Didn't I understand you to say you'd give a dollar for a story plot?"

"Well, I may have," I admitted.

"I assume you are a writer. I just happened to have one opening in my client list, so I accepted your offer and filled your order."

I slipped a bill from my wallet. The little man took it, crumpled it into a ball and gave it an impatient toss. I tried to follow it but couldn't. Meanwhile, he disappeared.

Of course, I only gave him the dollar to ease my conscience. After all, the poor little chap did deliver quite a story idea and this was all taken verbatim right off my tape.

I'll probably never see him again. I'm no sucker! Yet, you know, it is an intriguing thought. If a man were really careful, there'd be no excuse for falling into a stupid trap like that.

In fact, let's see. It's about noon now. In twelve hours, it will be midnight, the beginning of a new day . . .

Winston Marks

PSYCHIC STATIC

When in a confidential mood, better-class mystics admit that modern technology has vastly complicated their job. Odd and confusing effects are caused by high-power electric transmission, diathermy, X-ray, radar, sonar and other such apparatus. One trance artist, for example, picked up the Milton Berle show—without a TV set.

No less bewildering are the peculiarities of modern language, as when Paulette Goddard was warned that she would be shot if she went to Spain. Defying the prediction, she went—and was shot. She made five films there.

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Bottled in Russia

By A. J. GREENWALD

*Comes the genie with the
bright-red hair named Ivan
—comes the revolution!*

IT must be admitted at once that Ivan was not a good communist. In fact, as Vasili Novikov said repeatedly and to his face, Ivan had the intense aversion to work of a Wall Street capitalist. Vasili was the manager of the col-

lective farm, and it was he who had ejected Ivan from its relative comfort. Ivan's exile was in a barren waste, comprising a small hut with mud walls and a thatched roof, surrounded by stones of all sizes with just a hint of earth here and

Illustrated by KOSSIM



there by way of chic contrast.

It was not that a man of Ivan's stocky build was physically unable to do his collective share. Perhaps, as Vasili suggested, the trouble was that a mere thirty-two years was not long enough for Ivan to become accustomed to the doctrine and practice of work. Even with his stomach depending on it, his daily output was distressingly low. Prospects for the fall harvest were as distressingly dim.

Ivan was surveying his rock garden and doing his Soviet best to ignore the rumble of his empty stomach, when he noticed the speck in the sky. Rapidly, it grew bigger than any bird, yet he heard no sound of motors.

Ivan wondered if this could be one of the flying saucers the war-mongers were said to be sending over Mother Russia for no one knew what foul purpose? Ivan picked up some handy rocks for throwing, just in case.

THE speck grew larger still, and soon he could see that, instead of being round, it had a rectangular shape. It was flying low and coming toward him at a modest rate of speed. But instead of traveling in a straight line, it wandered off, first in one direction, then in another.

As it came erratically closer, Ivan could hear what sounded like singing, even though Ivan—whose

voice had been compared unfavorably with that of a horse—felt he could carry a tune better.

Surely this was a cursed flying saucer, even though it looked more like a carpet soaring through the air—for was not the singing in a wild, foreign tongue? So Ivan reasoned, with Soviet logic.

He gripped one of the stones and lobbed it at the enemy—and had the satisfaction of seeing it curve over the front of the vehicle to score a thudding hit in the midst of the foe.

For a moment, there was no reaction. Then, as Ivan was winding up for a second throw, an evil, bearded face, topped by a blue turban, peered over the fringed edge of what now certainly seemed to be a carpet. The beard opened up and curses were thrown down at Ivan, who let go with the second stone and missed the face by a whisker.

Before Ivan could get a third stone ready, the carpet was beyond him and accelerating rapidly. Then it turned, made a rapid circle around him and shot high into the air. When it was almost out of sight, it reversed direction and dived for the spot where Ivan stood. This was too much for Ivan, who lit out for other parts and, seeing the carpet almost on top of him, threw himself into a ditch.

Something flew past his ear and exploded into flying fragments, but



aside from a cut on the cheek, he was miraculously unhurt. The carpet almost hit the ground, but leveled off at the last moment and began climbing steeply again. Lying there, as flat as he could, Ivan became aware of a smell he had not experienced for a long time. *Vodka!*

But the carpet was coming again. Ivan looked up to see a hairy arm extend itself to hurl something that looked like a bottle. Another bottlelike object flew at him simultaneously from the other side of the carpet. Ivan's luck held. Neither object hit him. The first landed ten yards off, with the sound of breaking glass, to send fragments flying in all directions, accompanied by an enriched aroma of vodka. The other landed farther away with a muffled thud.

The carpet flew off again and, seemingly out of ammunition, faded to a speck and vanished.

WHEN Ivan was sure that the enemy was gone for good, he picked himself out of the ditch.



The last bottle-shaped object turned out actually to be a bottle, and the contents promised well from the richness of its color. With all the stones in the field, it was nothing less than a miracle that it was not broken, a miracle of which Ivan lost no time in taking advantage. The stopper was wedged in tightly, but it came out under the pressure of good proletarian thumbs and, with it, to Ivan's dismay, a huge cloud of black smoke that swirled as if swept by a tornado.

Even before Ivan could stumble back, the smoke had coalesced into the figure of a tall, swarthy, slant-eyed Genie with a small smoky tail, wearing a huge black cloak lined with crimson silk.

"What, Master, is your desire?" the stranger said. "Your slightest wish shall be granted, to the limit of my powers."

"Do you," said Ivan, on his guard against trickery, "come from Wall Street?"

"Many long years ago, I came from Persia, but since then I have made my home in this bottle and have sworn an oath to serve well whoever opens the bottle. What is your pleasure, Master?"

"You mean you'll do anything I want?"

"That's the idea. Merely make known your desires. *If you please.*"

"Well, what can you do?" asked Ivan.

"It would be easier," said the Genie, "to tell you what I can't do. As a matter of fact"—here the Genie produced an enormous sheaf of papers—"there are many things I can't do. For instance, it says here, in paragraph 4089 on page 765 of my contract with Solomon, that the party of the second part—that's me—shall abide by all laws passed by the government of the country he is in which are in force during the time he is there, and shall not interfere with the politics of the country. Furthermore, he shall be governed by all the precepts of justice laid down by the party of the first part—that's Solomon—in paragraphs 276 to 3562. Solomon was a bug on justice. Fearfully explicit, he was. But you won't be interested in all that." The contract vanished.

"Perhaps it will serve simply to mention that most of my past masters have started off modestly by asking for the finest palace ever made, staffed with obedient slaves and a few hundred of the most beautiful and graceful of adoring dancing girls."

"Ummmm," said Ivan. "Let's start with the palace."

THERE was no time for him even to shut his eyes. There, in front of him, was the palace, extending in either direction as far as he could see. Its myriad domes glittered with gold and were

all but lost in the clouds. The walls were of gleaming alabaster, and there, right in front of him, was a monster mosaic of Stalin, made up of diamonds, emeralds and rubies—mostly rubies, which shone redder than the red flag itself. And from the monster pipe he characteristically had in his mouth, at judicious intervals came huge puffs of real smoke.

"Stalin's dead," said Ivan. "It's Malenkov now."

"They keep getting bigger," the Genie sighed.

"Of course," the Genie said, as he made the change and the pipe vanished, "everyone wants the best palace ever, and it's not so easy to keep thinking of improvements—but you can always increase some dimension or other by a mile or so. Shall we enter, Master?"

They were swallowed up by the huge portal and found themselves walking along a plush carpet overlaying a marble floor. Light flooded the palace, though there were no fixtures visible. Nubian slaves, clad in Cossack uniforms, were hurrying everywhere, but all knelt to the ground when they saw Ivan.

The Genie hurried him to the center of the room, where they stepped onto a rather drab-looking Persian rug. The Genie made a pass with his hand and they rose straight up in the air. The ceiling above opened at their approach,

as did the one above that and the one above that and so on, until they were in the topmost room of the palace. The open windows looked down on the earth far, far below and, through the gaps in the clouds were dots representing collective farms and, far off and a goodly distance below, could be seen the snow-capped mountains that, from the ground, had always seemed to reach right up to the sky.

Ivan turned pale. Then he turned yellow, quickly shading into green. "Quick!" he gasped, clutching his throat. "Get me down. One story—make it one story high."

THERE was thunder, Ivan's sight dimmed, and the enormous palace was compressed to a single story. But the job had been done so quickly with so little advance notice, that the Genie forgot to reduce the number of servants. The ranch-style palace now contained as many servants on one floor as had been considered necessary by the Genie for hundreds. Ivan found himself completely surrounded by black faces, topped by Cossack hats. He was in no condition to stand this.

"Take them away," he gasped. "All of them!"

The slaves vanished instantly. "Well," the Genie sounded unhappy, "we didn't need *all* of them,

but it's going to be rather a chore taking care of the place all by myself. But if you have no prejudice against a few only slightly capitalistic labor-saving devices, invented right here in Russia, you know, I can—"

"Bah! Why do I need this big place. One room will be enough, about the size of the room I had before. This is bigger than I'm used to anyway."

THE ranch-style palace became a one-room palace. The walls were still of alabaster, the roof of gold and the floor of marble. The light which came from nowhere seemed to give the air a quality that made breathing an intoxicating thing.

"Now . . ." said Ivan, stepping forward. The treacherous marble floor swept his feet out from under him and thumped him painfully on his head.

"I know," said the Genie and, with a wave of his hand, transformed the marble into good solid hard packed dirt.

Ivan picked himself up and glowered at the now inoffensive floor. Then he looked around at the white walls and up at the gold roof. Through the open portals could be seen the stony soil of Mother Russia.

"It's no good," he said emphatically. "Maybe it would be all right for Moscow, but not for

here. There should be walls of clay and a thatched roof, like before."

"It's a point," said the Genie. "And we aim to please. It shall be as you wish, Master."

"And now," said Ivan, squatting amidst familiar surroundings, "now the dancing girl."

"Yes, Master. The girls will—"

"No! Girls—trouble. One girl—all right."

"But these girls won't—"

"One girl!"

The Genie swallowed hard and waved his hand.

She was very lovely. Her face was like an innocent flower just opened to the beauty of the world. Compared to her, the women of the collective farm seemed gross and sexless. The once glamorous Tania Gavrilenko now had all the appeal of the fence-posts for which she dug holes.

She danced—a flower tossed in the wind.

"No!" shouted Ivan. "She is beautiful—yes. But *look* at her—she could never do a good day's work in the fields."

"But, Master, why should she have to work in the fields? I can—"

"Women must work in the fields! And, of course, in the kitchen."

"But—"

"Who is master here?"

"You are, Master. Then you

want a woman to work in the fields?"

"Yes. But she must also be able to — uh — that is I would like her to —"

THE Genie was dancing with rage, smoke pouring from his mouth and presenting a very horrible picture, indeed. "I will not do it. No! I will not turn out slipshod work. A dancing girl, any dancing girl I produce, will dance your heart away. She will keep your body warm at night, and your soul will dance day and night. But her fingers will be bruised by the touch of any farm implement. On the other hand, any woman I produce for field work will turn the very rocks into magnificent vegetables, fruits and herbs. But in the house she will trip over her own feet and in bed—"

Ivan shook his head.

"Yes, in bed, for after all she is a woman. In bed, she will plague you from sundown to sun-up. She is a field woman, yes, and you will swear that she is more like the rocky field, than a woman.

"Of course, if you have a dancing girl too, then—"

"No! One woman — pleasure. Two women—pain. Couldn't you, just this once?"

"No, no, no! I'll turn in my bottle first."

"All right. The girl for the fields."

THERE was the familiar wave of the Genie's hand, and she appeared. If Tania had seemed like a clod compared to the dancing girl, this creature seemed like a misshapen mountain and made Tania seem desirable once more. Features which stood out, because of their color, were her hands and arms. Her thumbs were a brilliant, virulent green which shaded to yellow, orange and then red on her right arm and to blue, a deeper blue, then violet, on her left arm. Staring at the color was a relief, for it took Ivan's eyes off the other details.

"Won't you change your mind?" the Genie pleaded. "I can—"

Ivan gulped. "No. Can she cook?"

"Oh, yes. Fit for a sultan. Fit for a commissar."

From the supplies produced by the Genie, the field woman, whose name was Gada, cooked a wonderful dinner for the three of them.

When Gada had done the dishes, the Genie prepared to retire to his bottle. But it was still early with a long evening ahead. Ivan looked at Gada, glanced around looking for the source of the wonderful light that flooded the little cottage and finally looked appealingly at the Genie. "The light," he whispered.

The Genie nodded understandingly and there was darkness so

dense that even Gada's gross outlines could not be seen.

After a more than suitable time, Ivan and Gada went to bed.

II

IT was an exhausted Ivan who watched Gada's distant figure pulling the plow the next morning. But, as the day wore on and Gada continued to work without cease, always in the field except when she was quickly and expertly preparing food, Ivan's body rested and his spirit rose.

The field was taking on an amazing aspect. Planting seeds procured by the Genie, Gada was working with amazing speed, leaving a trail of green sprouts behind her as she toiled. As the Genie had promised, even the rocks seemed to be sprouting. And her borshti was superb, her black bean soup out of this world, while her blintzes all but sat up and begged to be eaten.

The following morning, an exhausted Ivan saw a truck garden ten times as large as the tract he had intended to work, with its smallest plant up more than six inches. And, on this day, while he rested his full stomach, Gada planted fruit trees that the Genie obtained for her.

As the days followed one another, Ivan began to put on weight. Gada worked in the field, where

the plants grew so tall that Ivan and the Genie could not see her, but had to guess where she was by the movement of the plants as she worked among them, or from the direction of the luscious fruits and vegetables that she playfully threw at them.

But Ivan was eating so well and resting so comfortably during the day, that only mild curses came to his lips. The Genie seemed very relaxed and contented with the life he was leading, with no one constantly making demands for *here* a castle, *there* a mountain to be moved, *everywhere* girls, girls, girls.

By the time two weeks had gone, it was harvest time, and the Genie produced huge wagons, into which Gada loaded the finest harvest of all time. Never had there been such tomatoes, lettuce, broccoli, spinach, beans of all kinds, as well as many strange foods whose names Ivan did not care to know while he could continue to have his fill of them served temptingly.

But finally, the wagons were full and hitched to one another and all of them attached to a tractor, produced by the Genie who carefully explained the simple operation of the vehicle to Ivan.

Off drove Ivan to the collective farm, head held high and looking neither right nor left. He came to the sparsely planted fields which he knew so well, and his ex-fellow

workers looked in wonder and turned from their work to follow his train of wagons to the main courtyard.

Voices called to him, but Ivan gave them no heed. In the courtyard, he stopped the wagons and sat smugly as questions and exclamations rained upon him. Then, as the manager of the collective farm, Vasili Novikov, came hurrying around the corner of the main house, Ivan pushed the button as the Genie had instructed. The bottoms of all the wagons rose up at one side, causing all of the produce to fall onto the ground at the feet of the assembled workers. Indeed, several had to move fast not to be buried under the heaps of vegetables.

Then, without a word, Ivan started up the tractor again and took his chain of now empty wagons away to his distant hut, his Genie and his Gada.

BACK at the collective farm, all was chaos. The peasants ran first to one pile of food, then to another. They called each other's attention, first to this tremendous radish, then to that gigantic cucumber.

But Vasili Novikov was made of stronger stuff. Not for nothing, was he the director. He stood aside and, after the first stupefying moment, thought hard about the problem. In the first place, know-

ing Ivan, it was clear that he had not grown these vegetables himself. Secondly, someone must have given Ivan the tractor and wagons. Thirdly, the motive for all this was clear. The farm was completely demoralized and it would be some time before things got back to normal.

Another such visit from Ivan, and none of his people would want to continue work which produced such comparatively puny results. This would ruin him, even if it did not ruin the whole farm. Who would want to do that? There was his boss, Sobokov, but it could hardly be him. Sobokov—and Novikov shuddered—could easily send a platoon of soldiers down to see him and that would be the end of Novikov.

So it could be no one but the capitalist enemy. Who else would have such tractors and wagons? Who else would throw away such magnificent food while their own people starved? *Ha!* That was the answer.

Giving instructions to several of his less bemused men, Novikov went down the road, walking between the tracks made by Ivan's wagons.

AT the cabin, all was serene. Gada was hard at work, preparing the ground for the next crop, while the Genie sat in front of the hut, amusing himself with

small feats of magic. By the time Ivan delivered the tractor and wagons to the Genie and prepared for dinner, the meal was on the table. Ivan ate heartily.

Five days went by, during which Gada planted new acres as well as the old ones, and a new crop was well on its way to another record harvest when the blow fell. On the road that Gada had made by planting corn along one side of it and tomatoes on the other, came a military vehicle, with Vasili Novikov grandly sitting in the back seat and two soldiers in the front. They drove up to the hut and the three of them got out.

"Ivan," said Vasili in an awful voice, carefully cultivated to put rebellious peasants in their place, "call your woman in from the field!"

While Gada was on her way, Vasili made it clear that he knew the credit for the crop was due solely to the woman. Furthermore, Ivan had been placed there to work and had not done so. Furthermore, Ivan's actions were not considered consistent with those of a loyal Russian. Furthermore, he, Vasili, would have to consider strongly the probability that it was his duty to report Ivan as a deviationist. It was only his soft heart that had prevented him from doing so up till now. And finally, he was taking Ivan's woman with him, so that she could practice

her skills on the fertile fields of the collective farm.

Now the Genie was standing by all this time, but at no time did Vasili or the soldiers give any indication that they saw him.

"I am sorry, Ivan," said the Genie. "Novikov is the law in this place and, because of my contract with Solomon, I am powerless to treat him as he deserves."

IVAN looked at Vasili's soft, complacent figure and shook his head. "There is no need," he whispered out of the corner of his mouth.

Vasili's oration had taken long enough for Gada to arrive at the hut. At a signal from Vasili, the soldiers seized her and attempted to lead her to the car. A shrug of her shoulders sent both of them flying. They picked themselves up and drew guns. "Get in the car!" one of them ordered. She grinned at him.

"Ivan," Vasili ordered, "tell her to do as she is told!"

"Gada," Ivan said carefully, "you are to serve Vasili Novikov fully, in all ways."

Ivan and the Genie stood shoulder to shoulder, watching the dusty cloud disappear around a bend in the corn.

The Genie said, "My Master is very wise. Your enemy will be well served, in the measure he deserves. If you so desire, Master,

I can summon Gada's sister, who is so like her that no one can tell them apart."

Ivan looked out at the field regretfully. He failed to repress a shudder as his glance found the bed. "I don't think so. Uh—maybe that dancing girl . . ."

"Now you're talking!" enthused the Genie.

III

SO Ballinda came to live with Ivan and the Genie.

Her heart was gay, her step was light, her beauty intoxicated the spirits. Her main desire was to please Ivan, but she could be independent too, and Ivan bourly found new, pleasing facets of her character. She danced tirelessly and, when Ivan could not stand not touching her for another moment, she came quickly to him and made comforting little sounds as he held her close. She was an A-1 companion.

The Genie beamed approvingly on the two of them and at the right moment, would wave his hands and produce food even beyond the culinary talents of Gada. But, with Ballinda in his arms, Ivan found his heart so overflowing that even his stomach seemed full, and it was all he could do to put away two portions of everything while his eyes feasted upon her. Slender, insubstantial Ballinda, true dancer

that she was, ate more than Ivan and the Genie together.

Their life together was a lovely idyl, written by an ancient Persian poet who beamed each morning when he fizzed out of his bottle till he gurgled back into it at night as the stars emerged.

AND all this time many strange, wonderful and horrible events were happening at the collective farm. Vasili had borne Gada there in triumph. He immediately put her to work in the fields, and the entire group of peasants watched, with mouths agape, the way the plants responded to her touch. The first trouble developed when she refused to eat the food supplied by the farm's cooks. When the cooks—there were three of them—protested against her intrusion into the kitchen, she shook them up a bit.

After that, they followed her directions, with consequent vast improvements in the food, but with great unwillingness and many grumblings. The next trouble occurred when Gada invaded Vasili's sleeping chamber and ejected Tania from Vasili's bed—to the surprise and delight of the rest of the group. When Vasili tried to object, he was tossed back into bed and Gada closed the door firmly in the face of the crowd of night-gowned figures.

It is not the purpose of this

narrative to horrify the reader, and it should suffice to say that, three days later, a thinner, older looking, thoroughly cowed Vasili walked the long road to Ivan's paradise. To Vasili's amazement, where there should have been fields of vegetables and orchards, as planted by Gada, there stretched a smooth carpet of resilient green turf, with every blade exactly one inch high. And here and there, as one might casually toss a handful of grain to the wind, were trees with billowing clouds of gold and silver for foliage. Up ahead, where Vasili could barely make out Ivan's small cottage, there was motion.

Moving from tree to tree, Vasili approached the cottage without being seen. As was often the case, Ballinda was dancing on the lawn. Watching her dance drew the pain of the last few days—and nights—from Vasili's body and spirit. Desire and evil resolve replaced the defeat and disillusion that had filled him just a short time before. He watched, motionless, until Ballinda disappeared into the cottage for lunch and then he crept away.

Back at the farm, he summoned two men he could trust to do his bidding. The rest of the group would not like what he had in mind, but they would know better than to protest.

That night, when Gada entered Vasili's room, she was struck down

from behind. It took Vasili and both his men to carry the hound and gagged woman to the car.

All unsuspecting, Ivan, Ballinda and the Genie had retired for the night. In the moonlit night, Vasili and his men invaded the cottage, and a blunt instrument deepened Ivan's sleep, while a cloth was thrown over Ballinda's head, and she was carried off to the car. They then dragged Gada into the cottage. The Genie's small bottle went unnoticed.

WITH a groan, Ivan sat up. Unaware of what had happened, he held his head and cursed. He turned to where the slender Ballinda should have been and, even in the dim light, recognized the form of Gada.

"Genie!" he shrieked.

The Genie, recalled from a dream in which he was effortlessly proving his superiority to King Solomon, was slow to respond. His smoke hung in the air indecisively for a moment, and then his figure became visible as though he were slowly approaching through a dense fog.

"Where," said Ivan, presenting his problems in their order of importance, "is Ballinda? Oh my head!"

The Genie's face was pained. Dealing with matters in reverse order, he first waved his hand, curing Ivan's headache, and then

told him what had happened.

"Bring Ballinda back," said Ivan simply.

After relieving himself of several interesting Persian curses, the Genie said that he could not act in the matter.

"You see," he explained, "Vasili is the law here. I can do nothing about Ballinda. But I can get you another dancing girl, in all ways—"

"No!"

The Genie shrugged his shoulders.

Ivan collapsed and would have hurt himself, if the solicitous Genie had not materialized an over-stuffed chair to catch him.

Ivan regarded the chair with wide eyes, while he considered the wonderful powers at his command in all matters except the one thing he wanted. And then his expression brightened.

"You *helped* me!"

"But of course. The law of gravity is not covered in the contract and I broke no other laws."

"But then, if I try to rescue Ballinda, you will help me if you don't have to break any laws?"

THERE was a moment of silence, while the Genie looked upward and waited. Then he nodded. "It's all right," he said. "I can help you if you don't ask me to break the law. If you do, I will not only have to undo what I have done, but will have to improve

things for Vasili." The Genie became depressed again. "But what can we do? Any attempt to take Ballinda away is forbidden. Any attack on Vasili is also forbidden."

"Wait a moment," said Ivan suddenly. "Ballinda isn't Russian. Doesn't she have any rights as a foreigner?"

"Though she is a foreigner, she has the same rights as a regular citizen."

"Then we must do something to discredit Vasili so he won't be in charge. Even before that we must protect Ballinda." It was as though he were back in his guerilla warfare days. "First of all, we need a little time to think. Therefore . . ."

At one moment, the car was proceeding down the road through the rain toward the collective farm. The next moment, a wheel came off, and the car was in the ditch.

Vasili and his two men, Izmailov and Filippov, got out of the elderly vehicle and examined the damage. Aside from the missing wheel and the impossible position of the car, no harm seemed to have been done. But it was in such a position that much more than the efforts of the three of them would be needed to get it back on the road. Nevertheless, at Vasili's command, they gathered together at the far side of the car and all grabbed hold and lifted.

Back at the hut, the Genie

sighed and shook his head. "Illegal," he said and waved his hand again.

The three men heaved again, and the car unexpectedly gave way, sending the three of them face down in the mud. With mire dripping from their noses, they looked wonderingly at the vehicle above them. It was back once more in the middle of the road and Ballinda was still in the back seat. But it was no longer the same car. Gone was the muddy, small, elderly, disreputable car. There, sleek and shiny and new, was a veritable monster of a car. The headlights, which were on, threw twin shafts, suitable for anti-aircraft searchlights, through the torrential rain which was spreading the mud evenly through their clothing. They looked at the car and dared not look at each other. The rain beat down.

"Get in the driver's seat, Filippov," ordered Vasili. "We will be right behind you."

FILIPPOV, who was wet and getting wetter and had no choice anyway, made a fine show of nonchalance as he climbed out of the ditch and opened the door.

Instantly, a light appeared within the car and Filippov was back in the ditch.

"Coward," muttered Vasili. "You go, Izmailov."

"I have a wife and three children," explained Izmailov, "and a fourth on the way. If Stalin himself was alive, he wouldn't ask me to approach this accursed machine. No factory built such a thing. Let us abandon it and go back to the farm where we belong. This woman of Ivan's will only bring bad luck. Look at the bump on the head she brought Ivan. I leave it



to your excellent wisdom, Vasili, and I am sure Filippov will agree with me that—"

"*Quiet! Cowards, both of you. I will drive the machine.*"

Vasili slid cautiously into the driver's seat. His men got into the back seat. They shut the doors and the light went out. Izmailov moaned. After a moment, the front door opened and the light went back on. By the light in the front, Vasili could see a long line of buttons and something that looked exactly like a key in an ignition lock. Vasili turned it on.

But the miracle car had no gear-shift. Still, who could tell with an enchanted vehicle? Picking at random, he pushed one of the buttons. Silently and smoothly, the top of the car picked itself up, folded itself and disappeared in the back. The rain beat down unmercifully upon its occupants. Vasili yelped and quickly began pushing other buttons. Izmailov and Filippov cowered silently, hardly daring to watch as lights went on and off, windows went up and down and, suddenly, the sound of a great orchestra boomed in their ears.

IVAN and the Genie watched the scene in a crystal ball. Looking at the wet bundle that represented Ballinda, it occurred to Ivan that even Ballinda would need some fixing up to look beautiful after being unwrapped. The

vain hope occurred to him that maybe Vasili would not want her when he saw her. And then he had another idea.

"Genie, couldn't you do something to Ballinda, something temporary so that Vasili would not want her?"

"Like what?"

"I've got it—a good stiff case of American measles. That way, they'll run when they see the red spots on her face."

"I don't know. That might be considered illegal as she is a prisoner of the law. Of course, if you want to take the chance . . ."

"Go ahead."

The gesture bestowing the American measles was made. Then the Genie winced and looked unhappily at Ivan.

"What happened?" Ivan asked fearfully.

"We tried to make Ballinda temporarily repulsive. So now, when they take off the cloth covering her, she will be temporarily irresistible."

Ivan shuddered.

Vasili noticed a small lever attached to the steering column, decided hopefully it might be the gear shift. He pushed it into what he hoped was first gear and, before he realized what was happening, the car backed up, one side went down, the other side rose up, and it rolled over on its side in the ditch.

All four of them were dumped gently into the mud. Not daring to say anything to each other, the three men picked up Ballinda and started the long march through the rain to the farm.

IV

MRS. Izmailov waited grimly for the return of her worthless husband. Little Kantanya had been sick and her mate was out gallivanting! She waited for him with a broom.

She was at the door when the three men came in, carrying Ballinda. Her husband's pitiful, soaked plight would not have prevented her from beating him with the broom, but Vasili glared at her and shouted to her to go to bed, as he and Izmailov and Filippov carried Ballinda to Vasili's room. Daunted, Mrs. Izmailov followed at a distance.

Ballinda was dumped on Vasili's bed. In haste to look at his prize, Vasili ripped off the cloth covering her. The effect on the three men was electrifying. Mrs. Izmailov, peeking around the edge of the open doorway, saw nothing but a frightened young girl, much too thin, with foreign-looking features. But the three men were gripped by a spell that drew them irresistibly to the girl. As Vasili bent over her, Filippov caught him by the arm and swung him back while he

in turn bent over Ballinda. By that time, Izmailov had arrived and thrust both of the others aside in his urgency to reach Ballinda.

In less time than it took for Mrs. Izmailov's mouth to drop open, the three men were in a whirling tangle of flailing arms and legs in the middle of the room. As they pounded each other and the furniture in the room, Mrs. Izmailov came in, brandishing her weapon. *Whack* went the broom. *Whack, whack, whack!* But the men paid no attention to the furious woman and her poundings.

She looked about for a more suitable weapon, and the men bumped into her and knocked her sprawling. She came up, spitting like a cat, with a heavy pitcher in her hand. Taking furious aim at her husband's head, she swung the pitcher through a long arc and broke it against Vasili's pate. Vasili fell to the floor and the fight was over.

The three of them looked at their fallen supervisor with dismay and at the quantity of blood streaming from his head. Vasili did not stir. Finally, Filippov bent down and felt for the beat of Vasili's heart. Nodding reassuringly at the other two, he lifted Vasili and laid him on the bed without a glance at Ballinda.

Filippov went for the doctor, while the Izmailovs headed for their room. A moment later, Mrs.

Izmailov returned to collect the frightened Ballinda. Leading her by the ear, Mrs. Izmailov took her to her room and put her in bed, against the wall. Then Mrs. Izmailov got in beside her. Just let her husband try something! She glared at him. With infinite resignation, Izmailov made himself as comfortable as he could on the floor.

IVAN beamed at the crystal. True, things had not worked out exactly as he intended, but Ballinda was safe for the moment. He beamed at the Genie.

"We have done nothing," the Genie told him, "as long as Vasili Novikov is in charge of the farm. His injury is not as bad as it looks. He will be on his feet again in a day or two."

"And what does he do when he is on his feet," Ivan burst out. "I'll tell you. Everyone must work. He is always here and there, making us work like horses so that he can meet his quota. So that Sobokov can take the food we should be eating ourselves and grow fat on it. So that Sobokov can think Vasili is a good manager. What would happen if the crop was small this time? What if the apples had worms and the grain weevils? Vasili would be through."

"And you want me to fix the shipment on the way?"

"Yes."

The Genie shook his head. "I don't think we can get away with it."

"But that's *our* crop," Ivan said heatedly. "Gada grew all that food."

"Well, we can try."

The Genie concentrated for a moment and, off to the north, a locomotive suddenly lost three of its boxcars and part of the weight of a fourth. But just as suddenly, the train regained its lost boxcars, plus twelve more, loaded to the top with food.

"That," the Genie explained to the downcast Ivan, "was classified as sabotage. And now the quantity of food has been trebled and the size and quality has been increased beyond anything known up till now."

Ivan groaned.

SOBOKOV, ever the efficient bureaucrat, rose from his bed at seven. At eight, he was in his office, ready for the usual day's business. But business was not as usual that day. Vasili Novikov's shipment had arrived during the night, and already the building was humming with rumors of the fabulous crop.

"Novikov, eh?" muttered Sobokov as he eyed the excitement of his underlings. He lost no time in getting down to the railroad yard. Almost none of the huge quantity of food had been unloaded, but

the men who had started on the first car had sampled its contents and then could not resist taking some of the fabulous cargo from each car to sample the wondrous food.

"Has anyone been eating this stuff?" demanded Sobokov.

Since this was against the rules, even the men whose jaws were hulging made indignant negative responses.

Sobokov picked up a particularly succulent-looking apple and bit into it. Never had he tasted anything that filled him with such satisfaction. There was a moment of intense inner conflict, but Sobokov had got where he was by being ruthless, and ruthlessness triumphed. "Pah!" he said shakily and even managed a slight grimace. He threw the apple behind him in disgust and ignored the sounds that plainly told of a fight over who should have the rest of it.

He then went from crate to crate, condemning this, making faces at that and spitting frequently. When he had made a complete tour, he turned and faced the crowd of workmen.

"Comrades," he shouted, "see how the saboteurs, the capitalist spies, have invaded our land. Here is one of the most beautiful crops I have ever seen. Yes, I even admit freely that it looks better than the crops you men have been growing

here. But it is just another capitalist trick, for every item is spoiled. I have no doubt that it is poisoned and I am going to hurry back to my office for medical treatment. Let no man touch this shipment, for I declare it to be condemned, and I'll send a crew down to destroy it. That is all."

So, he thought, *Novikov thinks he can get my job by such methods, does he? We shall see.*

Back at his office, he picked up the phone. "Get me Major Starobin," he ordered.

THE Genie straightened up from the crystal ball and began waving his hands. Ballinda popped out of the air at Ivan's side. Back at the farm, Mrs. Izmailov felt the emptiness of the bed beside her and then started screaming at her husband. The bed that held Vasili had lost its occupant.

Ivan was delighted to see Ballinda and patted her hand. But he was sad too, for he knew he could not keep her for long. He said as much.

"I will never leave you," Ballinda said, "if you want me to stay."

"Four others have seen you. There will be inquiries about the food Gada grew. Even if Vasili is no longer in charge, he will make trouble. I am so sad."

"I have taken care of Vasili for you, Master. This is a case where

my contract with Solomon clearly allows me to act."

"What have you done?"

The Genie's face took on a look of cunning. "I have learned from you, Master. At first, I returned Gada to her country. But she likes Vasili, so I have placed them both in my bottle, where they will remain for all time, since Vasili will never get through the neck of the bottle without my help."

"In that little bottle? Both of them?" Ivan asked incredulously.

"It is not as small inside as it seems outside. They will have ample room. Wait till you see my new bottle. It will be smaller on the outside and larger on the inside."

"But if Vasili is in the bottle, they will suspect me. Then they will send soldiers anyway. If the soldiers see Ballinda . . ." Ivan shuddered.

"Would the Master wish to be taken to another section of the country?"

"It is no use. The world is full of men and women. Of all the women, there can be none to compare with Ballinda and all the men would desire her. Some commissar will see her and that will be the end of me."

"But could we not go to some part of the world where there are no commissars?"

"*What?* Leave the freedom and security of Russia? *Never!*"

"But there are no commissars in the Western World. There is no one there who would have the power to separate you and Ballinda, if you wished to be together."

"Truly?"

"Truly."

"But I heard . . . Of course Andreyovich always said . . . No, but then the Red Army officer said . . ."

"It is as I have said."

"But then, of course, we shall leave, won't we, Ballinda?"

"Yes, dear."

"Then what are we waiting for?"

"**W**HICH country would you like to go to, Master?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter—as long as Ballinda and I can be together. Of course, it would be nice to have lots of sunshine as we sometimes have here. Maybe we could have a little castle like the big one you built for me in the beginning. But I guess it would be out of place, except maybe in your country?"

"No," said the Genie regretfully, "my country has changed its style of architecture and besides, things are rather unsettled there. But there is one place where, if your castle will be out of place, it will be because it is too plain and small."

"I shall miss the green lawn and also Gada's fields."

"But you needn't. For not only is this place sunny, but the soil is so rich that anyone can just throw the seeds down and jump back as they sprout from the ground."

"And I can keep Ballinda there?"

"Almost all women there are beautiful and it is only the ugly ones that people turn to stare at."

"And where is this miraculous place?"

"It is in a place called California, in the United States of America."

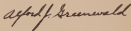
"What? The land of the warmongers from Wall Street? The capital of capitalism itself?"

"As an ex-Communist—"

"But I have never been a Communist—only a Russian."

"It makes no difference to them. As an ex-Communist, they will give you the keys to the city and ask your advice on all important matters. Come, Master, the flying carpet waits."

The carpet rose swiftly and headed west at great speed. Soon its three riders—five, if you counted the two in the bottle—were beyond the borders of Russia and aiming straight for the wonders of California, in the United States of America.



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